12-2020

An Examination of the Implementation of PreK-Grade 3 Alignment Approaches in a Minnesota Public School System

Megan Rogholt

An Examination of the Implementation of PreK-Grade 3 Alignment Approaches in a Minnesota Public School System

by

Megan Magwire-Rogholt

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of Education in

Educational Administration and Leadership

October, 2020

Dissertation Committee:
John Eller, Chairperson
James Johnson
Beth Mann
Kathleen Ofstedal

Abstract

Schools are not widely structured to systematically align curriculum and elements of instruction in early childhood through third grade (Ewen & Herzfeldt-Kamprath, 2016). Ewen and Herzfeldt-Kamprath (2016) report that the quality measurement of pre-k programs and early elementary classrooms differ greatly. Children bring a multitude of social, academic, and life experiences with them when they enter the school system.

In 2018, Minnesota's Department of Education created a PreK-Grade 3 Initiative to educate instructional leaders on the importance of implementing a high-quality early learning pathway in schools. Although Minnesota's Department of Education incorporated Kauerz and Coffman's (2013) "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating PreK-3rd Grade Approaches" in statewide trainings for schools, few studies regarding the understanding and use of the eight key components and their relationship in the transfer pathway to establishing a successful and comprehensive preschool–grade 3 continuum (in Minnesota) have been found.

A case study, utilizing a qualitative program evaluation model, was used to gather information on a PreK-3rd grade approach in a school district in central Minnesota. This case study obtained detailed descriptions from administrator, teacher, and parent interviews and focus groups. The interview and focus group questions were created by the researcher after referencing Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework. The following research questions guided the case study evaluation:

1. Of the eight components of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches, what factors led the district/schools to choose the components they are implementing?
2. What factors do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians report either promote or inhibit the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight practices?
3. What benefits have PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians reported they have observed in students since implementing practices of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) P-3 approach?
4. What recommendations do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians provide for schools interested in implementing Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework in their P-3 programs?

In summary, the data collected through this qualitative case study revealed a significant level of alignment between the components implemented in the school district and the components of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches." The factors promoting and inhibiting implementation were also determined to be relevant and are detailed in the research. Although this study is not generalizable, the findings support the benefits and recommendations outlined in the framework.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to my committee members and cohort colleagues who provided me with the motivation, knowledge, and guidance to complete this meaningful work. Dr. John Eller, Dr. Jim Johnson, Dr. Beth Mann, and Dr. Kathleen Ofstedal, I am most grateful to each of you for leading me through this experience.

To Kathy, who has been my educational inspiration since I began my path in education in her undergraduate education courses. Thank you for instilling in me a passion for teaching and achieving educational excellence. To have my mentor by my side through this experience has been a great gift.

To my husband, Phil, and our children, Lily and Kellan. Thank you for your patience, love, and encouragement during every step of this process. I am the luckiest wife and mom to have each of you on my team.

To my parents who have been my educational cheerleaders throughout my life. Both of you provided me with a model of hard work and perseverance. I am so grateful for your advocacy of and belief in my abilities to achieve whatever I put my mind to. I have succeeded because of your commitment to my education.

The journey to completing a doctoral degree has been rewarding, joyous, and at times, overwhelming. To suddenly lose my dad only two weeks into the start of the program made the feat seem insurmountable. My commitment to remaining in the program during this most challenging time waivered only momentarily due to the continued guidance and support of my mom, husband, children, extended family, and close friends. I am confident this achievement is what would make my dad the most proud.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my dad, Randy, who modeled hard work, dedication, and perseverance in every aspect of his life. I have been blessed to be your daughter.

Table of Contents

Chapter Page

Chapter Page

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter I: Introduction

The Importance and Development of pre-K—3rd Grade Approaches

In 2013, Dr. Kristie Kauerz and her colleague, Julia Coffman, developed the original "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating PreK-3rd Grade Approaches" in an effort to "improve the quality and coherence of children's learning opportunities, from the experiences children have before they enter the K-12 system and extending through elementary school" (Kauerz & Coffman, 2013, p. 1). This framework was designed around Kauerz's original work where she identified eight key practices to establish a successful and comprehensive preschool–grade 3 continuum (Jacobson, 2011). Among these effective practices are:

- creating collaborative mechanisms;
- ensuring that administrators are instructional leaders;
- empowering teachers to focus on instruction and teamwork;
- aligning standards, curricula and assessments;
- establishing a student-centered learning environment;
- relying on data to improve instruction and guide reform;
- engaging families; and
- moving children along a high-quality pathway (Jacobson, 2011).

Schools are not widely structured to systematically align curriculum and elements of instruction in early childhood through third grade (Ewen & Herzfeldt-Kamprath, 2016). Ewen and Herzfeldt-Kamprath (2016) report that the quality measurement of PreK programs and early elementary classrooms differ greatly. Children bring a multitude of social, academic, and life experiences with them when they enter the school system.

Minnesota's Department of Education created a PreK-Grade 3 Initiative, incorporating Kauerz and Coffman's (2013) research, to educate instructional leaders on the importance of implementing a high-quality early learning pathway in schools. Workshops were provided in six locations across Minnesota in 2018-2019. These workshops focused on elements of high-performing P-3 systems, teaching and instructional quality in P-3 systems, and blending and braiding resources to support a P-3 system.

Statement of the Problem

Although Minnesota's Department of Education incorporated Kauerz and Coffman's (2013) "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating PreK-3rd Grade Approaches" in statewide trainings for schools, few studies regarding the understanding and use of the eight key components and their relationship in the transfer pathway to establishing a successful and comprehensive preschool–grade 3 continuum (in Minnesota) have been found.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) key components in a Minnesota PreK-3rd grade aligned public school system. Attainment of an aligned educational structure in grades PreK-3rd is achievable when systems utilize the research and implement the research-based approaches with fidelity. The goal of this research was to examine: 1) which of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight components for P-3 approaches a school system chose to implement; 2) the factors stakeholders reported promoted or inhibited the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight components; 3) the student benefits stakeholders noticed since implementing components of the P-3 approach; and, 4) the recommendations stakeholders offered future implementors of the P-3 approach practices.

Conceptual Framework

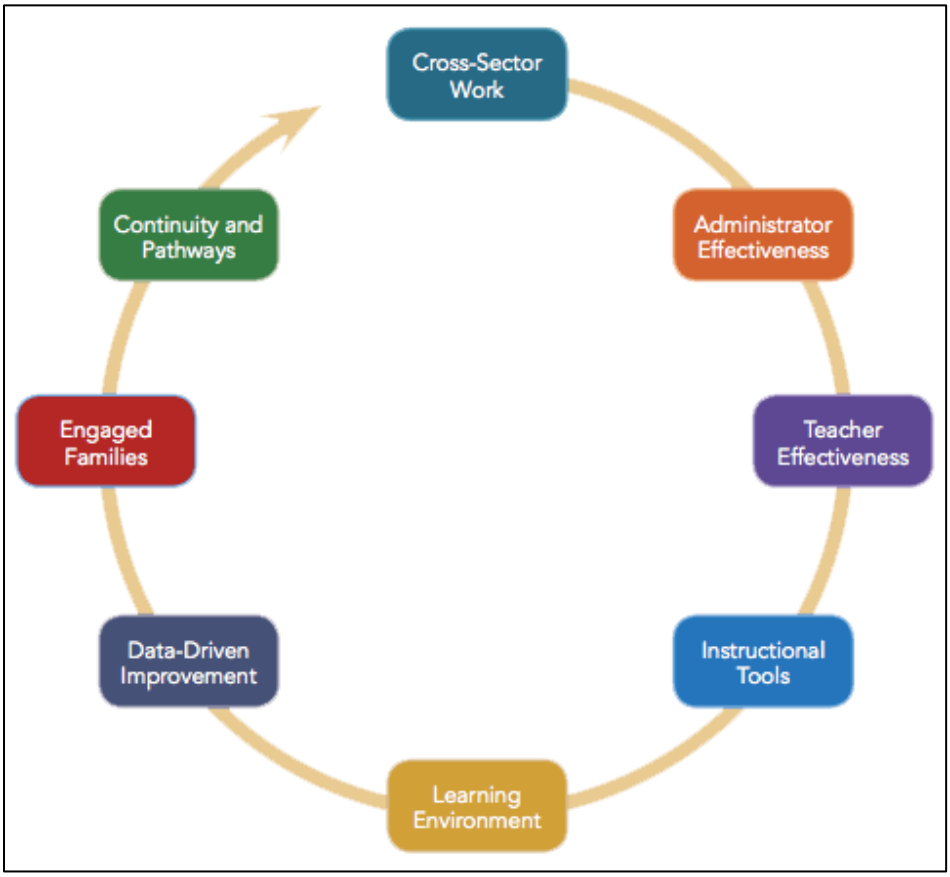
Kristie Kauerz and Julia Coffman (2019) utilized Urie Bronfenbrenner's "Ecological Systems Theory" as a conceptual framework while developing their "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches." Bronfenbrenner's research and theory on the development of children in social, biological, and ecological systems is foundational in Kauerz's research, suggesting children are a part of multiple ecosystems, including their home, family, school, and societal and cultural systems (Psychology Notes HQ, 2019). "Each of these systems inevitably interact with and influence each other in every aspect of the child's life" (Psychology Notes, HQ, 2019, p. 1).

Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches" is divided into eight categories or buckets that have been identified as high-quality and comprehensive components to P-3 alignment approaches. These eight categories overlap and depend on each other for effectiveness. Although the categories are intertwined, each one is represented individually to be able to:

> 1) emphasize the importance of being explicit and intentional about addressing each category of effort; 2) recognize that some districts and communities may not have the resource capacity to implement all eight buckets; and 3) highlight the different activities and strategies that can create and reinforce meaningful changes in adult behaviors/skills and changes to the system itself (Kauerz & Coffman, 2019).

Figure 1.1

Framework Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches (Kauerz & Coffman, 2019)



Research Questions

The study had four guiding questions that led the evaluation and were directly aligned with the selected conceptual framework theory. The guiding research questions were:

1. Of the eight components of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches," what factors led the district/schools to choose the components they are implementing?

2. What factors do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians report either promote or inhibit the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight practices?
3. What benefits do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians report they have observed in students since implementing practices of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) P-3 approach?
4. What recommendations do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians provide for schools interested in implementing Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework in their P-3 programs?

Research Design

A case study, utilizing a qualitative program evaluation model, was used to gather information on a PreK-3rd grade approach in a school district in Minnesota. This case study had detailed descriptions from multiple viewpoints on the alignment of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight components. The factors promoting or inhibiting the implementation of these approaches, as well as the perceived benefits were researched. Finally, recommendations for future implementors of PreK-3rd grade alignment approaches were studied.

Qualitative research most closely aligns with process-oriented frameworks and evaluations (Roberts, 2010) and was utilized during principal, early childhood coordinator, and community education director interviews, and teacher and parent/guardian focus groups. A review of organizational documents, including mission and vision statements and referendum information, occurred during the interviews. Regarding qualitative research methods, The Administration of Children and Families (2016) state, "Data often are collected in the settings

under study, and they aim for rich description of complex ideas or processes, albeit typically across a limited number of individuals or settings" (p. 4).

Assumptions of Study

The following was assumed to be accurate when conducting key research for the study:

- Participants responded to interview questions openly and honestly.
- Responses provided by participants accurately reflected their professional opinions.
- Documentation of a school's mission and vision, and referendum information were available for review by the researcher.
- The study sample was representative of principals, superintendents, a community education director, an early childhood coordinator, and teachers who have worked in this school system for a minimum of two years, and parents/guardians with children who have attended three or more years.

Delimitations

Delimitations are factors under the control of the researcher and may affect the outcome of the study (Roberts, 2010). This research was limited in its scope to one particular school district in Minnesota, therefore the findings may only be applied to this district. The research was conducted during the spring months of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants had recently transitioned to distance learning, therefore statements may have been reflective of the changes in teachers' content delivery. The participants were interviewed via Zoom®. The researcher offered tutorial trainings to any participant who was not comfortable with the Zoom® platform prior to any interviews. Due to the researcher's extensive background in early childhood education and leadership, the research may have elicited some biases surrounding the

importance of early learning. The researcher sought the expertise of other educational professionals to determine if and where biases were present.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this research paper and defined for the readers of this study. Definitions for each term are based on scholarly research.

B-3: The span of time encompassing birth to grade three (Ewen & Herzfeldt-Kamprath, 2016).

Continuum: The alignment of care and learning vertically over time as children progress through early care, preschool, and the early elementary school years. This alignment addresses standards, curricula, assessments, instruction, environments, and transitions. The horizontal continuum consists of the multiple opportunities and supports provided to children and families at every stage of development and the communication and coordination of care, support, and learning experiences (Jacobson, 2016).

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP): A framework used within early childhood education settings where educators embed child development theories, children's identified strengths as determined by authentic assessments, and children's cultural backgrounds to appropriately educate and nurture learning and development (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020).

Distance Learning: A method for delivering instruction online without in-person interactions between teachers and students (Stauffer, 2020).

Early Childhood: The span of time between birth and age eight. Occasionally considered to be the time between birth and Kindergarten entrance. The influence of environments and the

people surrounding children are high during this stage of development (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): Education law signed into action by President Obama in 2015. This law ensures student and school success by upholding equity in all educational capacities; teaching to high academic standards; sharing vital student information among educators, families, students, and communities; increasing access to high-quality preschool; and expecting action and accountability (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Organizational Document Review: Reviewing documents as a way of collecting data and information to help to better understand the history and operation of the school district or program (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020).

P-3: The span of time encompassing pre-natal to grade three or PreK to grade three (Ewen & Herzfeldt-Kamprath, 2016).

PreK: An abbreviation for the term *pre-kindergarten*. Refers to the years 3- and 4-year-old students engage in school prior to Kindergarten (Che et al., n.d.).

Pre-kindergarten: The years students engage in school prior to Kindergarten, typically during the ages of 3, 4, and 5 (Che et al., n.d.).

Preschool: Refers to both the environment and the years of school students engage in prior to Kindergarten (Che et al., n.d.).

Preschool to Third Grade Alignment: Policies and practices developed to maintain a positive developmental pathway for children ages birth to 8 (McCormick et al., 2019).

PreK-3rd Grade Approach: An effort to improve the quality and cohesiveness of the experiences children have before and during the years of pre-kindergarten to grade three (Schilder, 2018).

Third Grade Reading Proficiency: Most states, including Minnesota, have defined the end of grade three as a benchmark for proficiency in reading. The goal is for all students to be reading at or above grade level by third grade. Grade three, however, does not mark the end of reading instruction and the task of learning to read (Minnesota Department of Education, 2020a).

Stakeholders: Refers to individuals or groups who are affected by the decisions made in school systems. For the purpose of this study, the term refers to administrators, teachers, students, parent/guardians, families, and community members (Kauerz & Coffman, 2019).

Transitions: Seamless process of sharing information, progress, development, and data related to student success; moving from one grade level to the next (Ewen, 2017).

Summary

The study is presented in five chapters. Chapter I contains a background and introduction to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, conceptual framework, research questions, research design, assumptions of the study, delimitations, assumptions, definition of terms, and organization of the study. Chapter II consists of a review of the related literature as it pertains to a PreK-3rd grade approach to educational alignment in three themes: benefits of PreK, historical context, and essential approaches. Chapter III describes the methodology utilized in conducting the study, including an overview of methods, research design, setting, participant process, and data collection and analysis. Chapter IV summarizes the findings of the study and provides answers to the research questions, and Chapter V provides conclusions and recommendations for the field and further research.

Chapter II: Review of Related Literature

In the following review of related literature, research regarding preschool through grade three systems alignment is summarized. Three themes emerged in the literature review: the importance of preschool, historical information on preschool through grade three systems, and key approaches of preschool through grade three systems.

Introduction

The early childhood years, those spanning birth to age 8, are a time when rapid growth and development occur (Jacobson, 2011). Considering the human brain is the only organ that is not mature at birth, the first years of a child's life actually shape the "architecture of the brain" (Greely et al., 2008). This is a period when "brains are most influenced by contextual factors, inputs, and stimulation" (Bassok et al., 2015, p. 1) and the foundation for future success is formed (Center on Enhancing Learning Outcomes and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017). "During early childhood, the young brain is at its most malleable, so those years constitute a particularly effective time to affect developmental trajectories, and thus long-term life outcomes" (Bassok et al., 2015, p. 1). In 2007, the National Scientific Council of the Developing Child reported that a child's brain is most capable of growing in its first years and that ability diminishes as a person ages. Interventions that occur during a child's first few years of life are far more effective than those implemented after a child begins elementary school (Hite & Lord, 2015). "Because developmental plasticity declines with age, early childhood is both a promising and critical time to fundamentally improve cognitive and social skill development" (Bassok et al., 2015, p. 1). So it is of great importance that research has acknowledged learning does not begin at a child's entrance into kindergarten, but rather before birth (Hite & Lord, 2015).

During these early years, disparities in children's learning are beginning to emerge. "Gaps in learning are evident as early as 9 months of age and persist as children continue through school" (Atchinson & Diffey, 2018, p. 2). By the beginning of kindergarten, an achievement gap of nearly one full standard deviation in the areas of math and reading is often visible for students who have attended early childhood programming and those who have not (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013).

Some of the most critical work and cost-effective investments Americans can make is that of improving early education programs for children ages birth through grade three. Proficiency in reading and an understanding of the mechanics by the end of third grade is a critical milestone in a student's learning process (MinnCAN, 2014). In order for this to happen, consistent and continual exposure to emergent literacy skills is necessary throughout the early childhood years (MinnCAN, 2014). Over half of the students who dropped out of school in the last year were on that solid path by the time they were eight years old (Atchinson & Diffey, 2018). Nationally, 30% of fourth graders are not meeting grade-level benchmarks on reading tests, and 50% of those students are African American or Hispanic. Nearly half of these students will not graduate on time, if at all (Atchinson & Diffey, 2018).

> If children do not have proficient reading skills by third grade, their ability to progress through school and meet grade-level expectations diminishes significantly. While all areas of children's learning and development are critical for school success, the predictive power of a child's third-grade reading proficiency on high school graduation and dropout rates is concerning. Children who are not reading proficiently by third grade are four times less likely to graduate high school on time. Children who are not reading proficiently by third grade and also live in poverty are 13 times less likely to graduate

> high school on time. In the last decade, more than half of all students (63%) who did not graduate from high school on time were not reading proficiently in third grade. (Daily, 2014, p. 2)

With the introduction of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, states are currently eligible to align the improvement plans of their schools to the developmentally appropriate standards of early learning for children ages birth to age 8 (Center on Enhancing Learning Outcomes and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017). "States and school districts across the country are beginning to fix this problem and focus more of their school improvement and achievement gap closure strategies on the early years" (Center on Enhancing Learning Outcomes and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017, p. 1). In order to significantly improve the grade three literacy scores for Minnesota students, alignment of PreK through third grade literacy standards, instruction, assessment, and teacher professional development must occur. This alignment would cause students to transition into each new grade level with the skills necessary to meet or exceed expectations. Teachers would share similar goals, academic language, and instructional strategies both horizontally and vertically within their school systems (MinnCAN, 2014). With Minnesota currently ranking at the bottom of the United States in access to preschool, it is not surprising to find 40% of Minnesota's children beginning kindergarten not prepared for the content, rigor, and social environment. "And in K-12, Minnesota's achievement gaps persistently rank among the worst in the nation" (MinnCAN, 2014, p. 4).

The Importance of Preschool in a PreK–3rd Grade Approach

Children are born ready to learn, and yet high-quality early learning programs that support this readiness are the least funded and accessible in our educational systems (Thrive in 5,

2009). Children bring a multitude of social, academic, and life experiences with them when they enter the school system. If systems wait to align kindergarten through third grade with the early learning experiences of preschoolers, critical years of development will go unnoticed, while gaps in learning will likely exacerbate and will be challenging, if not impossible to close (Foster & Miller, 2007). "These achievement differences have early roots: The same groups of students behind by the second and third grades are also behind in kindergarten and first grade, and at kindergarten entry" (Cannon & Karoly, 2007, p. 1).

> Researchers have found,
>
> long-term positive outcomes from preschool programs on high school graduation rates, additional years of education completed and lifetime earnings, as well as lower crime and teen birth rates. A 2010 meta-analysis from Rutgers University found additional long-term benefits for children who attended preschool programs, including higher grade-point averages, fewer instances of special education placement and lower rates of grade retention. It also found benefits from preschool participation on key social and behavioral measures such as self-esteem, school adjustment, aggression and antisocial behavior. (Hite & Lord, 2015, p. 4)

Other researchers have noted that as preschool participation increases nation-wide and public expenditures on early education rise, the average math and science test scores of eighth graders have increased (Frede & Barnett, 2011).

From 2004-2005, the nation's total state spending for preschool was $2.84 billion, slightly more than 1% of the states' total K-12 budget which reached $240 billion during the same time period (Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2008). An abundance of research has been completed documenting the "return on investment" preschool programs yield.

"The potential payoff on this investment is large: high-quality model preschool programs have been found to return $4 to $10 in future benefits per dollar spent–in preventing later risky behavior and in boosting academic and labor market success" (Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 2013, p. 1).

States often report a "return on investment" for early education when compared to the high costs of special education. "While high rates of special education placement drive up public education costs, high-quality, state-funded pre-K programs can help prevent some of these placements before school entry if children are properly screened for developmental delays early and supported by highly qualified teachers through specialized services" (Hite & Lord, 2015, p. 6). However, research has determined that not all early learning programs, have returned positive results, especially when implemented with criteria less than that of high-quality benchmarks as the findings from the 2013 national evaluation of Head Start indicates (Gomez, 2016; Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 2013). This research shows that the quality of programming is a significant factor in the sustainability of cognitive and social-emotional outcomes for students as they transition through the primary grades (Gomez, 2016).

> Research shows that children who participate in high-quality early childhood classrooms experience improvements in language and literacy, social-emotional and cognitive development, and overall school performance as measured by academic grades and consistent school attendance. At the same time, research has shown that these benefits of early learning are fundamentally dependent on the quality of teaching and adult interactions the children receive in their early learning environments. Enhanced early learning outcomes require that early childhood teachers have the skills, knowledge, and

> competencies needed to promote learning and development starting at birth and extending through the early elementary years. (Martella & Connors-Tadros, 2014, p. 2)

While the instructional focus in high-quality preschool programs is on all of the developmental domains of learning, it is the social-emotional instruction and experiences that secure the largest academic achievement results in future years (Dusenberry et al., 2015; Hite & Lord, 2015). “The real benefits are not from making children smarter, but from nurturing children’s noncognitive skills, giving them social, emotional, and behavioral benefits that lead to success later in life” (Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2008, p. 4). Regulating emotions, persisting through challenges, enjoying the process of learning, developing friendships, and engaging positively with peers are skills with firm connections to academic achievement and social-emotional development.

> For example, two groups of preschool children with average cognitive ability but different levels of social skills were followed through first grade and had different academic outcomes that year: the children with higher social skills scored significantly higher on tests of academic achievement. Alternatively, the absence of social-emotional skills and/or presence of problem behaviors such as aggression, hyperactivity, and bullying are related to negative academic as well as social outcomes. (Atkins-Burnett, 2007, p. 20)

Early education creates a solid foundation for school success. High quality programming in the early years sets students on a path to graduate high school, complete higher education, decrease crime and drug use, and aid in the reduction of poverty. PreK through third grade programs that deliver instruction grounded in research and best practices provide positive outcomes for all students, especially those at risk of academic failure (Muschkin, 2018). “Early

gains and achievement are most likely to persist if educational efforts are integrated in a Pre-K to Grade 3 policy framework that emphasizes improved program access, quality, and alignment" (Muschkin, 2018, p. 1).

Historical Context

Historically, embedding and aligning early learning standards between childcare, early education programs or preschools, and students' elementary schools has not been a consistent practice. Early education teachers, who have often spent years with these young learners, eventually need to send them to a variety of elementary schools that may or may not integrate developmentally appropriate learning standards that correlate to the students' current levels of progress. Communication among the preschool and elementary teachers regarding students' learning styles, academic challenges, and social-emotional skills is sporadic and inconsistent. Parents often share this concern, anticipating information about their children will likely not be shared with the next grade level's teaching staff. Researchers have discovered more effective ways for both children and parents to transition from preschool education to elementary grades (Jacobson, 2011). In the 2012 publication, *Educational Alignment for Young Children: Profiles of Local Innovation*, five cities highlighted a strategy they are using to guarantee students are meeting or exceeding grade level expectations by the end of third grade: early childhood through third grade alignment (National League of Cities, 2012).

Early childhood has typically operated separately from the K-12 education system even though they each have the same goal, educating children in ways that allow them to achieve their highest potential.

Researchers, practitioners and policymakers increasingly believe that a more seamless educational pipeline that addresses a range of academic, behavioral, health and family

> issues could serve young children more effectively. While early childhood investments are the starting point for a high-quality, aligned educational pipeline, the benefits of a high-quality early education can dissipate if these programs are not designed to meet the public schools' standards for school readiness or if children transition into elementary schools that do not adequately support their development. Furthermore, insufficient communication and coordination among systems and programs for young children can make these transitions difficult and lead to missed educational opportunities. (National League of Cities, 2012, p. 1)

Three key programs have accomplished the task of aligning preschool through early elementary schooling while incorporating the practices research indicates best supports children's growth and development.

Carolina Abecedarian Project

In the 1970s, the Abecedarian Project was implemented in North Carolina. The project expected children from economically disadvantaged childhoods to be successful in their adult lives with the proper treatments during the early years. In other words, students selected to receive high-quality education and early intervention from the Abecedarian project were more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and be gainfully employed. They would also be less likely to smoke marijuana, use other substances and become pregnant during their teen years (Muschkin, 2018).

Between 1972-1977, social service agencies and prenatal clinics helped to identify multi-risk families and their children for enrollment in the Abecedarian Project. The infants selected had to be free of biological conditions identifying them as having mental, sensory, or motor disabilities. Participants in this first phase were paired based upon the high-risk scores they

received during their application, and then randomly assigned to preschool treatment or control status groups. A total of 109 families, to whom 111 infants were born, agreed to the study terms and random assignments. Participants included 57 infants (28 girls and 29 boys) assigned to the experimental group, and 54 infants (31 girls and 23 boys) assigned to the control group. The family characteristics of all participants were very similar, including: all families were considered to be living in poverty, the mothers were approximately 20 years old, unmarried and living with relatives, did not graduate from high school, and did not report an earned income (Campbell et al., 2002).

For the infants enrolled in the experimental preschool group, they were treated with full-day childcare that included a high-quality curriculum with educational games focusing on cognitive, language, and adaptive behavior skill development. Skilled adults would engage with the infants by means of talking, sharing toys and pictures, and providing time for the infants to respond to elements in their environments. These infants also received nutritional supplements for the first 15 months of their lives, and if chosen to participate in the next treated phase, would receive two meals per day as well as an afternoon snack (Campbell et al., 2014, p. 1).

> As children grew, the educational content become more conceptual and skill based, and the curriculum was more group oriented for older preschoolers. Language development was especially emphasized. However, children always had freedom to choose activities, and the emphasis on individual development was paramount throughout. (Campbell et al., 2002, p. 2)

A benefit to all participants in the project, regardless of the assignment of experimental or control group, was the support of social services. While children in a preschool control group were not provided with Abecedarian childcare, many of them did elect to enroll in other

childcare settings through the project's 5 years. "Therefore, the treatment and control comparisons were between children who had the Abecedarian educational childcare and others reared either at home or in the variety of childcare settings utilized by local low-income families" (Campbell et al., 2002, p. 2).

The school-age treatment phase began when the children were 48 months old. Cognitive test scores assisted in pairing the children from the preschool and control groups before assigning them to the school-age treatment and control groups. Four treatment conditions now existed: children with preschool and school-age treatments, children with preschool only, children with school-age treatment alone, and those who were not treated in either phase (Campbell et al., 2002, p. 45). Families treated in the school-age phase were provided with a home-school resource teacher who served as a connective liaison between the home and public school environments for the first 3 years. The intention was to establish parent engagement in their children's learning. The parents were given two curriculum packets each month and were encouraged to work with their children for a minimum of 15 minutes each day, in addition to the daily preschool regimen for the students.

At the end of the preschool years, Abecedarian researchers had completed their original work and needed to decide whether to continue providing an educational support system and continuing their research into the years of kindergarten entry or simply follow the students' and families' progress during the remainder of their school experiences. The decision was made to do both methods. The original preschool intervention group was divided into two groups: a continued intervention cohort who would receive educational support through age eight and a controlled group who would no longer receive intervention. Additionally, the original preschool control group was divided in the same manner. "This design provided the opportunity to examine

and compare the long-term effects of (a) early and continuing intervention, (b) early intervention only, and (c) late intervention only, relative to performance of participants in a continuous control group" (Ramey et al., 2000, p. 7).

The continuation of intervention into the K-2 years of schooling allowed researchers to hypothesize that continued supplemental educational supports can influence children's social environments and learning experiences based on the premise that parent involvement in school is an influential factor in the success of public schooling. "The support program was therefore designed to influence the child's home learning support, to individualize school experiences during the academic year in a developmentally appropriate fashion, and to provide additional learning support over the summer—a period during which high-risk children typically lose ground academically" (Ramey et al., 2000, p. 7). The K-2 classroom teachers were provided with continuing education and support to ensure their instruction was developmentally appropriate and logically progressed from the instruction given in previous years (Ramey et al., 2000).

The research yielded favorable results for both preschool-only participants and those who received continued intervention in K-2 after preschool instruction. Children who remained in control groups in both the preschool and elementary years scored lowest on both reading and math assessments during K-2. Children who received interventions and supports during K-2, but did not receive a preschool experience, did only slightly better, while students who received preschool experiences and those who had both preschool and K-2 aligned experiences scored highest on the reading and math assessments as represented by the figures below (Ramey et al., 2000).

Figure 2.1

Standard Scores for Reading (Ramey et al., 2000, p. 8)

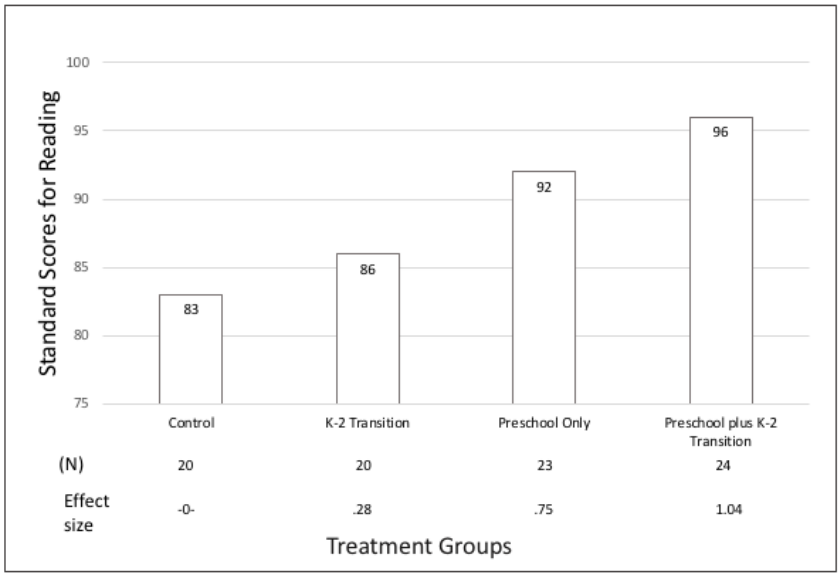
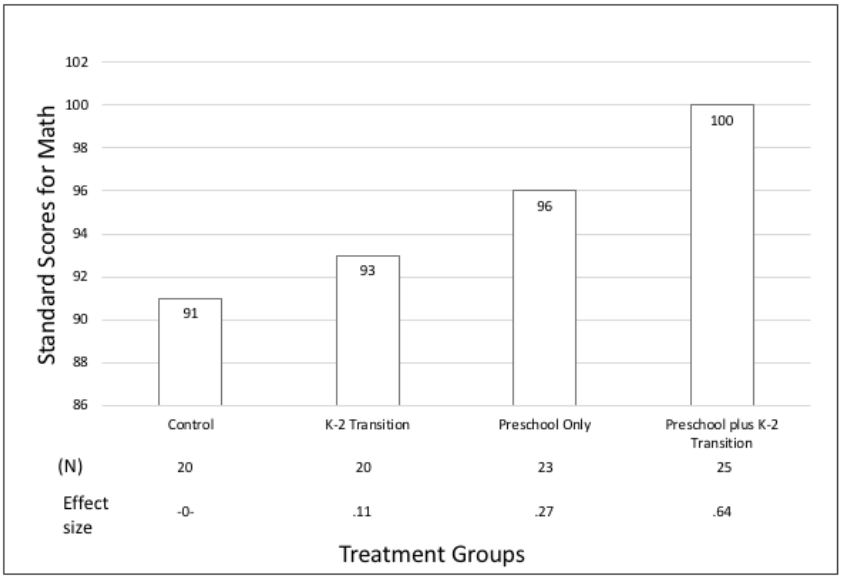


Figure 2.2

Standard Scores for Math (Ramey et al., 2000, p. 8)



In 1993, the original research concluded with a follow-up study conducted with 104 of the original 111 infants, who were now 21 years old. Four members were deceased, one member

had withdrawn, one member was no longer eligible for inclusion, and one declined participation. The results revealed high-quality educational care can make significant differences in the lives of those who were treated in the Carolina Abecedarian Project. Participants who attended preschool and received the aligned supportive services had significantly higher cognitive scores, were more likely to attend four-year colleges, and were less likely to become teen parents (Campbell et al., 2002).

HighScope Perry Preschool Project

In 1962, the HighScope Perry Preschool study identified 123 low-income children living in Ypsilanti, Michigan (Grunewald, 2013). These children were identified as being at risk of school failure and susceptible to crime, drug use, teen pregnancy, and unemployment. The study concentrated on the education, economic performance, crime prevention, family relationships, and health domains (Schweinhart et al., 2005).

Education. The high school graduation rate was significantly higher (77%) for participants with project's treatment versus the ones without (60%) (Schweinhart et al., 2005). Additionally, 88% of preschool treatment female participants versus 46% of the controlled female participants graduated from high school. "The program group also significantly outperformed the no-program group on various intellectual and language tests from their preschool years up to age 7; on school achievement tests at ages 9, 10, and 14; and on literacy tests at ages 19 and 27" (Schweinhart et al., 2005, p. 1).

Economic Performance. Seventy-six percent of the program group's participants were employed at age 40, while only 62% of the control group was employed, while respective median salaries were $20,800 vs. $15,300. Living arrangements were also considered to be more stable for the program group participants with most of them owning their own homes. Likewise,

more of the program group had savings accounts and had fewer needs for social services (Schweinhart et al., 2005).

Crime Prevention. "The study presents strong evidence that the Perry Preschool program played a significant role in reducing overall arrests and arrests for violent crimes as well as property and drug crimes and subsequent prison or jail sentences over study participants' lifetimes up to age 40" (Schweinhart et al., 2005, p. 3). Lifetime arrests, those arrested five or more times, were measured at 36% for program participants and 55% for non-program participants. The program group had fewer arrests for violent, property, and drug crimes, and fewer months in prison by the age of 40 (28% vs 52%) (Schweinhart et al., 2005).

Health and Family. Fifty-seven percent of the males in the program group were raising their own children at the age of 40, compared to 30% of the no-program males. "At the age of 40, 75% of the program group said they were getting along very well with their families, compared to 64% of the no-program group participants" (Schweinhart et al., 2005, p. 3). Sedatives and marijuana usage were exceedingly less utilized in the program group than the control group, and heroin use was reported as used by 0% of program participants and 9% of controlled participants (Schweinhart et al., 2005, p. 3).

Cost savings for prevention and sustainability concerns were documented in the High Scope/Perry Preschool study. It was determined that for every dollar spent, seventeen dollars were saved during the children's lives from ages 3 to 40 (Thrive in 5, 2009). Preschool program participants earned 14% more than their control group peers, the difference of over $100,000 by the age of 40.

Due to the success of this program, continued research is being performed to measure participants' successes in the early elementary education years. HighScope believes 'high-

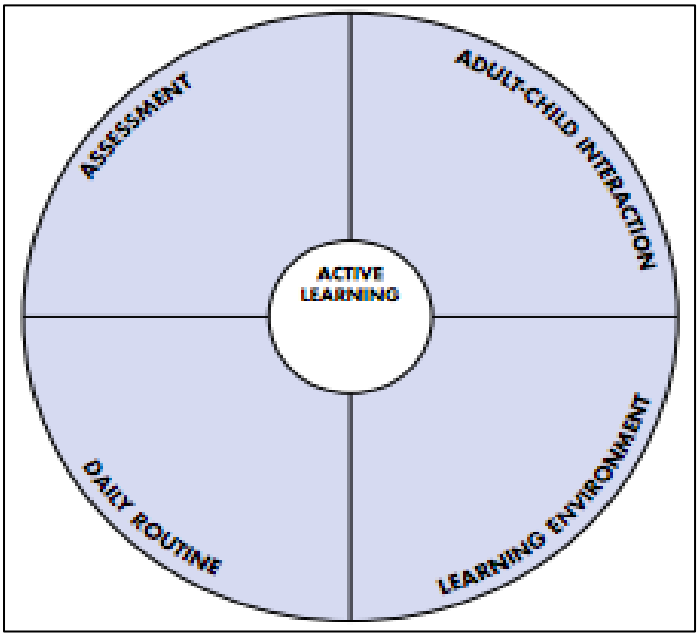
quality' can be measured by the fidelity in the continuity of practice, so they have continued to build a continuum of evidence-based practice for birth to grade three students. HighScope defines 'continuity of practice' as:

> …a continuous, dynamic interaction among experiences. When this 'interaction among experiences' nurtures and supports the optimal development of young children, we call this 'high quality.' And whether it's within one setting or between settings, when adults and children work together to establish and maintain a 'dynamic system,' that's when we see 'continuity of practice' at work. (Albro, 2016, p. 13)

HighScope believes that coexistence between academic demands and developmentally appropriate practice can occur in Kindergarten. To depict this belief and guide the curriculum, a Wheel of Learning was developed to graphically portray the continuity of practice as seen in the figure below (Albro, 2016).

Figure 2.3

Wheel of Learning (Albro, 2016, p. 14)



The components of the Wheel of Learning: assessment, daily routine, adult-child interaction, and learning environment all work together to support the active learning of the students. Each of these components are a prescription for the adults supporting the children's educational experiences.

HighScope has recognized the challenges of transitioning students to kindergarten from preschool. "Teachers, administrators, and parents often have different philosophies related to pedagogy, and in the past, many local communities have claimed that there is insufficient time, interest, or leadership to achieve consensus" (Albro, 2016). Because of this earlier belief, HighScope realized the importance of developing an aligned early education program. The program began to look at the transition into kindergarten as an opportunity to address the whole child, by including the family and early childhood and elementary teachers as "active partners and participants in facilitating and supporting a smooth and effective transition" (Albro, 2016, p. 14). This belief led to the creation of the preschool through third grade continuum at HighScope sites.

The birth to third grade continuum consists of criteria to systematically align the efforts of all stakeholders in the early years of students' preschool and elementary learning. The criteria are: preparing the child for kindergarten by providing opportunities to engage in activities sponsored by the school, but more importantly, preparing kindergarten for the child (Albro, 2016). Kindergarten preparation is achieved by ensuring the elementary school setting is ready for the children entering their environment. Historically, kindergarten programs have not reflected the developmentally appropriate approaches preschools provide (Albro, 2016). HighScope offers time for preschool and kindergarten teachers to gather and develop smooth transition protocols for their students. Missions and visions among all schools and educators are

aligned and communicated to all stakeholders. Assessments of both the program and student progress are frequently administered to maintain alignment fidelity. HighScope also incorporated a Professional Learning Community (PLC) structure for staff development purposes. This process has provided opportunities for communication, teamwork, consistency, and problem-solving among all educational staff (Albro, 2016). “The Curriculum serves as the foundation, but only through cooperation, communication, and coordination (and a lot of dedication) can you ensure that the children in your program receive the high-quality education that is so important for their lifelong development” (Albro, 2016, p. 18).

Child-Parent Centers (CPC P-3)

Originally founded by Lorraine Sullivan in 1967, a Child-Parent Center was formed in a Chicago elementary school to increase children’s well-being by providing early intervention and support for children, ages 3-9, and their parents. The goal was to develop language skills and self-confidence, and to demonstrate that children living in low socio-economic environments can meet the demands of society if only given the opportunity and support (Reynolds, 2020). As of 2020, Child-Parent Center programs (CPC P-3) have been developed in three states: Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. These sites have created a center-based early childhood model for their preschool through third grade classrooms and provide quality education and family-focused care and support.

The goal of a CPC P-3 model is to positively impact the well-being of students and families, particularly those living in low-income neighborhoods. “Because of their demonstrated impact on well-being, early childhood interventions are at the forefront of prevention for improving educational success and health” (Reynolds, 2020, p. 1). CPC P-3 programs set to improve early education for students and families through increased access to family engagement

opportunities, high quality instruction, and smooth transitions into subsequent grade levels. “By increasing the dosage, coordination, and comprehensiveness of services, the program is expected to enhance the transition to school and promote more enduring effects on well-being in multiple domains” (Reynolds et al., 2017, p. 1453). Collaboration among school personnel, community members, and parents helps CPC P-3 schools maintain supportive and well-informed learning environments for students. Similar to the components established by Kauerz and Coffman (2019), all CPC P-3 program sites implement six core elements that promote well-being and achievement:

1. Collaborative Leadership Teams: co-facilitated by the lead teacher and principal, and ensures all elements are effectively implemented;
2. Effective Learning Experiences: ensures mastery in all learning domains through small class sizes (17:2 ratio for preschool and 25:2 ratio for K-3), diverse and engaged instructional practices, and full-day preschool and kindergarten;
3. Aligned Curriculum and Practices: a balanced, activity-based curricula addressing multiple domains of child development and learning that is organized in sequential alignment with all grade levels and is updated annually;
4. Parent Involvement and Engagement: comprehensive, supportive, and engaging services and activities for families led by a parent resource teacher and school-community representative;
5. Professional Development: continued learning for educational staff available online with onsite support available; and,

6. Continuity and Stability: incorporates a comprehensive service-delivery model and provides year-to-year consistency for all students and their families (Reynolds et al., 2017, pp. 1455-1456).

Key Approaches of a Preschool through Grade 3 Continuum

The Carolina Abecedarian Project, High Scope/Perry Preschool study, and Child-Parent Centers have implemented many of the components research indicated leads to sustained positive effects for individuals (Muschkin, 2018). In 2013, Dr. Kristie Kauerz and her colleague, Julia Coffman, developed "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Pre-K-3rd Grade Approaches" in an effort to "improve the quality and coherence of children's learning opportunities, from the experiences children have before they enter the K-12 system and extending through elementary school" (p. 1). This framework was designed around Kauerz's original work where she identified eight key approaches that establish a successful and comprehensive preschool–grade 3 continuum (Jacobson, 2011). In 2019, Kauerz and Coffman updated their framework to encompass and emphasize that the research includes alignment from birth to grade three, as reflected in the title, "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches." The previous framework focused on PreK-Grade 3 approaches. Aside from the terminology changes in the title and additional equity language, the framework remains the same.

The effective approaches included in Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework are:

1. creating collaborative mechanisms;
2. ensuring that administrators are instructional leaders;
3. empowering teachers to focus on instruction and teamwork;
4. aligning standards, curricula and assessments;

5. establishing a student-centered learning environment;
6. relying on data to improve instruction and guide reform;
7. engaging families; and
8. moving children along a high-quality pathway (p. 11).

Nationwide, many school districts have implemented similar approaches for effective preschool through third grade alignment. These implementations are efforts to confirm the research on early childhood development and learning, engage families in schools and the learning process, increase access to early interventions, provide professional development for teachers to help increase the impact of their instruction, and create successful transitions for students from one grade level to the next (Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, 2006; Greeley et al., 2008; Muschkin, 2018; Reynolds et al., 2016). Each of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight key approaches will be further defined below.

Creating Collaborative Mechanisms

The goal of the *cross-sector work* component is to establish "mechanisms, resources, and structures that reflect, support, and sustain shared vision, collaborative relationships, and mutual accountabilities between 0-5 and K-12" (Kauerz & Coffman, 2019, p. 4). The necessary first step in creating a cohesive approach to preschool through third grade alignment is ensuring that community stakeholders learn about and are active in the process. Making connections with stakeholders outside of the educational system takes time, but builds buy-in and creates a message that can be shared by multiple community entities. These connections will offer varying perspectives and insight that create a strong system. After the collaborative community team has been developed, "B-3 community teams will use needs assessment, asset mapping, existing

strategic plans and community priorities to identify one or two common and measurable goals to work toward" (Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, 2006, p. 2).

Developing visions with distinct long- and short-term goals is necessary to manage the process and connect the appropriate stakeholders to the alignment work. A variety of partnerships, including childcare providers, pre-k and elementary school teachers, administrators, social workers, and financial specialists should come together to form a collaborative team. (MinnCAN, 2014).

The funding mechanisms for pre-k vary greatly from those for kindergarten through third grade. Minnesota state and local aide partially fund a variety of the state's pre-k programs, but the additional costs to sustain and fully implement come from grants and pre-k tuition generated by the programs' participants (Minnesota Department of Education, 2020a). In 2016-17, Idaho, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming did not provide any funding for their states' pre-k programming. However, in Maine, Oklahoma, and West Virginia, funding is allocated on a per-pupil basis from pre-k through grade twelve. Contrary to the funding discrepancies in pre-k across the nation, all 50 states fully fund kindergarten (at least partial day) through third grade with a blend of state and local revenue (Atchinson & Diffey, 2018).

Ensuring That Administrators Are Instructional Leaders

The *administrator effectiveness* component aims to assist administrators (district superintendents, school principals, and early childhood directors) in developing a culture and an organizational system that ensures quality of pre-k through third grade learning (Kauerz & Coffman, 2019, p. 5). In 2010, Illinois passed legislation requiring principals to obtain a new P-12 license, replacing the previous K-12 license, in an effort to better prepare principals in their

roles as both instructional leaders and leaders of schools that foster preschool programs. This law requires Illinois' higher education institutions to be reaccredited to demonstrate the inclusion of a deeper level of understanding of early childhood development and content in their principal licensure programs (Atchinson & Diffey, 2018).

Professional development for administrators needs to include state's early childhood learning standards and benchmarks, and also include alignment strategies that address all of the educational domains, appropriate learning environment protocols for all ages and grade levels (Martella & Connors-Tadros, 2014).

> This might mean that principals appreciate the role of play and other developmentally appropriate practices in building children's vocabulary skills; use assessments that capture the broad range of children's growth—not just math and literacy; and form partnerships with early-learning providers in the community to create greater awareness about the educational experiences children have before they enter school. (Jacobson, 2011, p. 12)

Feedback from principals and other administrators must be aligned with effective practice methodologies in early education if teachers are expected to impact their teaching and the students' learning in developmentally appropriate ways (Martella & Connors-Tadros, 2014).

Empowering Teachers to Focus on Instruction and Teamwork

The goal of the *teacher effectiveness* component is to ensure teachers are committed "to providing high-quality instruction and effective learning experiences for all children, PreK-3rd grade" (Kauerz & Coffman, 2019, p. 6). Researchers from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) have noted that teachers who are intentional, set goals, and provide "challenging and achievable experiences" are the most effective in their field

(Dusenberry et al., 2015, p. 535). "…The quality of instruction is the most crucial variable in ensuring school readiness and success in the ensuing years. All children benefit from highly effective teachers, but in the critical early years, teacher effectiveness is of utmost importance" (Clements et al., 2013, p. 814).

The requirements for preschool teacher preparation and licensing are vastly different across the United States. For example, preschool teachers in Minnesota are not included in the state's teacher evaluation system, while teachers of grades kindergarten through twelve are guided by the state's evaluation structure (Martella & Connors-Tadros, 2014). To ensure teacher effectiveness, preschool teachers should be held accountable to the same performance standards as those educators working in primary grades, although the evaluation system should reflect instructional practices that are developmentally appropriate for the learning of students in preschool through third grade classrooms (Martella & Connors-Tadros, 2014, p. 3).

While many states have birth through third grade teaching licensure programs, South Carolina is the only state where educators intending to teach students in grades pre-k through grade one must obtain a PK-3 license, as the other licenses do not cover this grade span (Atchinson & Diffey, 2018). In 2002, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) developed a resolution stating "that future preschool teachers have four-year degrees and should complete teacher preparation programs that are focused on child development and early childhood education strategies" (Jacobson, 2011, p. 15). When early childhood teachers have mastered the competencies and are fully certified and licensed, a level of professionalism is reached, demonstrating the important role these educators have in working with young children (Atchinson & Diffey, 2018; Jacobson, 2011).

In order to maintain teacher effectiveness, a professional development plan should be incorporated into a pre-k through third grade aligned system. Ongoing professional learning that is job-embedded, causes teachers to reflect on their practices, and involves the use of instructional coaches and observations of colleagues is a model proven to excel teacher efficacy (Jacobson, 2011; Martella & Connors-Tadros, 2014).

> Professional development should be a top priority for all states. The purpose of professional development is to improve teaching, but it also provides an opportunity to ensure that all teachers and administrators understand the requirements of the educator evaluation system and know how to use the measures, tools, and other resources to ensure quality control and equity across schools and districts. (Martella & Connors-Tadros, 2014, p. 26)

Designing opportunities for teachers from early childhood through third grade to learn together and share information about their instructional practices allows for collaborative and thoughtful transitions between grade levels for students (Jacobson, 2011). These intentional encounters would allow every educator to have a clear understanding of the skills students should possess prior to entering the next grade level, causing students' transitions to be smooth and gradual (Jacobson, 2011).

Aligning Standards, Curricula, and Assessments. The *instructional tools* component of PreK through third grade systems strives to confirm that "standards, curricula, and assessments focus on both academic and social-emotional skills, and are aligned to create instructional coherence, PreK-3rd grade" (Kauerz & Coffman, 2019, p. 7). "As children progress from infants and toddlers to preschoolers to kindergarteners and through the early

grades, they should experience a seamless transition and logical continuum of learning so that they are successful at each stage and prepared for the next" (Greeley et al, 2008, p. 50).

> Alignment refers to the natural progression of expectations, developmentally appropriate teaching and learning practices, and assessment strategies as children move through the preschool programs and grades in elementary school. As children approach the end of preschool, they should be working on tasks and concepts they will see in kindergarten. And the classroom environment and learning activities in kindergarten should include things the children are familiar with from their preschool setting. (Jacobson, 2011, p. 12)

Horizontal and vertical perspectives must be addressed when aligning standards, curriculum and assessments across grade levels (Daily, 2014). Horizontal alignment ensures that all professionals working within a grade level are approaching the instruction, strategies, and content in a similar manner, confirming all students are receiving high-quality learning experiences (Jacobson, 2011). Vertical alignment "refers to the process of ensuring that each level or grade provides a strong foundation for the next" (Jacobson, 2011). Without a vertically aligned system structure in place, it is not uncommon for elementary school teachers to teach content that students have already learned in preschool. When educators spend time teaching content students have already mastered, achievement is stalled. Advancing students' skills by integrating new and slightly challenging content can enhance students' achievement and sustain academic enthusiasm. "Furthermore, advanced content is beneficial for all kindergarten students, regardless of whether they attended preschool" (Hayakawa et al., 2015, p. 263).

Educators in early childhood and those in K-12 systems have often approached standards-based instruction from different perspectives (Jacobson, 2011). In 1998, *The National Education Goals Panel* determined five critical domains for early childhood education: approaches to

learning, cognitive, language and literacy, physical motor, and social-emotional development. These domains "now are widely agreed as essential in developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education" (Martella & Connors-Tadros, 2014, p. 3). Early childhood educators are skilled at implementing and reflecting upon these standards to improve their practices (Martella & Connors-Tadros, 2014).

Historically, early childhood standards have had a "whole child" focus, while K-12 standards have emphasized academics (Jacobson, 2011).

> A 2008 analysis of Pennsylvania's early childhood standards found that the state has provided a good model for aligned standards across the early years. The standards cover birth through second grade—a feature the researchers called 'unique' and 'forward thinking.' Another strength is that the standards have covered both academic and developmental content across the spectrum. (Jacobson, 2011, p. 13)

Assessing early childhood students by developmental domains is commonplace in preschool classrooms. Teachers evaluate student progress by observing students in each of the learning domains. Once students have transitioned into elementary school systems, they are typically assessed on the specific academic areas of language arts, math, and science.

> With the stakes for academic achievement increasingly high at the elementary level, this emphasis on cognitive development has led to a similar narrowing of focus in preschool assessments, and little attention has been paid to the interdependence of other types of development in early childhood. However, a child's readiness for success in school is dependent upon more than their cognitive abilities, so social-emotional, motor, and other developmental areas also should be assessed for this age group. (Atkins-Burnett, 2007, p. 2)

The responsibility educational systems have to the students and instructional staff is to embed assessments that measure the learning environment, honor the relationships between teachers and students, and examine the quality of instruction (Atkins-Burnett, 2007). “Measures of child outcomes should include authentic tasks and use multiple sources of information, while recognizing the difficulties inherent in obtaining reliable assessments of young children” (Atkins-Burnett, 2007, p. 17).

Establishing a Student-Centered Learning Environment. The *learning environment* component focuses on promoting collaborative relationships, while providing engaging learning experiences in a variety of settings for all learners and supporting the well-being of all individuals in both the physical and emotional environments (districts, school buildings, and classrooms) (Kauerz & Coffman, 2019). Classroom environments in an early childhood setting tend to receive considerable attention by teachers as they plan and prepare lessons. But environments should be student-centered or developmentally appropriate in all grades, and “shouldn’t be discounted or abandoned as children advance in school” (Jacobson, 2011, p. 14). Students’ learning environments should reflect their individual characteristics in addition to their family and community experiences (Castro, 2014). “From a socio-cultural perspective of development, children approach developmental tasks in particular situations based on the cultural practices in which they have previously participated” (Castro, 2014, p. 3). Quality learning standards embed cultural and linguistic characteristics and include guidelines for creating a positive learning environment (Dusenberry et al., 2015).

Relying on Data to Improve Instruction and Guide Reform. The sixth component of a pre-k through third grade system is *data-driven improvement*. In order to systemically improve schools, its programs and instruction, administrators and teachers must obtain and genuinely

reflect on high-quality data (Kauerz & Coffman, 2019, p. 9). Effective programs and educators use the data collected from observations and assessments to inform instruction and improve instructional methods (Atchinson & Diffey, 2018; Daily, 2014; MinnCAN, 2014).

Teachers at King Elementary School in Deer River, Minnesota meet frequently to review their student data, both by individual students and grade levels. This data is used to determine appropriate instructional needs and make adjustments to intervention groups. Teachers in grades pre-k through fifth at King Elementary School participate in all-staff and multi-grade meetings monthly to review whole-school data, identify benchmarks, and discuss student progress to determine what a whole-group and individualized instructional plan should look like. Data is accessed through the school's data system which maintains academic data together with attendance and behavior records (MinnCAN, 2014). The teachers and administrators work together to build intervention blocks into the daily schedule in an effort to keep students in their classrooms during the core learning times (MinnCAN, 2014).

King Elementary teachers also request observations and feedback from their administrators and teacher colleagues in an effort to learn from and gain effective instructional strategies. These teachers use their colleagues as job-embedded professional development to assist in improving their practices and increase student achievement in each classroom (MinnCAN, 2014).

Engaging Families. Engaged families "are actively and systemically involved with PreK-3rd teachers and administrators as full partners in helping their children develop, learn, and achieve" (Kauerz & Coffman, 2019, p. 10). Both principals and early childhood professionals have rated family engagement as the most important step in developing and maintaining a pre-k through third grade aligned system (Ready and Successful Schools Work Group, 2013). Families

are often uncertain of the expectations for their children and themselves as their students transition from one grade to the next (Jacobson, 2011).

> PreK-3rd grade alignment leads to stronger family engagement. When educators communicate more candidly with each other and with families, and when they have meaningful data to guide their instruction and conversations, families are more likely to get (and stay) involved. (MinnCAN, 2014, p. 8)

Research indicates that family engagement plays an essential role "…in students success, particularly beginning in the younger years…" and "is a fundamental ingredient for children's success in school" (Early Education Department of the San Francisco Unified School District, 2012, p. 43). An aligned system that provides feedback regarding their students' progress, allows parents to be active participants in their children's learning (Jacobson, 2011). "…School-family-community partnerships have the potential to increase students' chances of success by removing stressors and barriers, particularly for at-risk children, through providing a positive environment that is collaborative in nature" (Hayakawa et al., 2015, p. 2).

Moving Children Along a High-Quality Pathway. The *continuity and pathways* component of a PreK through third grade aligned system ensures "every child, especially those most at risk for school failure, has access to a continuity of services and a clear pathway of high-quality education from PreK through 3rd grade" (Kauerz & Coffman, 2019, p. 11). "Both research and common sense tell us that the most effective way to improve educational and economic opportunity for children—particularly disadvantaged children—is "to provide high-quality early learning experiences that ensure a successful and seamless transition to elementary and secondary school, and beyond" (Jacobson, 2011, p. 5). Programs that are of high-quality reduce grade level retention and special education referrals, while increasing students' social-

emotional skills and academic achievement (Daily, 2014). Research has determined that for young children living in poverty, attendance in a high-quality preschool program diminishes the early achievement gaps (Daily, 2014). “Though access to preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-olds has increased significantly over the past decade, the benefits of these programs (i.e., achieving success in third grade) are not likely to be realized if they do not meet critical benchmarks of quality” (Daily, 2014, p. 14).

Transitioning students seamlessly to the next grade level is an integral part of the PreK through third grade educational process. North Carolina and Washington are two states that have developed a Kindergarten Entry Assessment tool to aide in transitioning students from preschool to kindergarten (Atchinson & Diffey, 2018; Muschkin, 2018). This comprehensive tool is assisting in identifying the most effective methods for communicating transition information, providing feedback to better inform preschool and kindergarten instruction, providing information to teachers on practices that will encourage parent partnerships, and increasing educator expertise in literacy, math, and differentiated instructional practices (Atchinson & Diffey, 2018; Muschkin, 2018). Other states are recognizing the need to standardize the transition process after witnessing the long-lasting academic benefits of a smooth transition from preschool to kindergarten, and they are quickly following the practice of developing a kindergarten entry assessment tool (Muschkin, 2018).

Additionally, a seamless transition is supported by education experts “so that learning is consistent and supported, year to year” (Dusenberry et al., 2015, p. 539). Limiting the amount of time used to teach content that has already been mastered in the previous grade is an added benefit of an aligned system (Jenkins et al., 2015). West Virginia Board of Education Policy 2525 mandates its county collaborative teams provide opportunities for preschool and

kindergarten teachers to discuss their students' academic and social abilities prior to their formal transition. This policy also requires an established system to transfer assessment documentation on the children transitioning into kindergarten (Atchinson & Diffey, 2018). Aligned transition processes allow parents to actively share information and become partners in the educational experiences of their children (Atchinson & Diffey, 2018).

Summary

The literature review briefly outlined the research regarding preschool through grade three systems alignment. The importance of preschool and historical information on preschool through grade three systems were also summarized. Finally, the literature review provided research-based information regarding the key approaches of preschool through grade three systems.

As determined by the review of related literature, embedding the components of effective P-3 systems benefit the children and families participating in aligned programs. These benefits have demonstrated lasting positive effects on the development of children and growth of parenting skills. Creating buy-in from stakeholders and securing funds to support these aligned efforts are barriers many systems experience. Schools and programs who have overcome these barriers have positively impacted the care and education of children and families.

Chapter III, Methodology, provides a detailed description of the study, including the research design, participant selection, instrumentation, and aspects related to how the research questions will be summarized. Details regarding how the data will be gathered and analyzed are also included.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

The review of related literature indicated the need for continued research on the effects of a continuous system of aligned practices serving students in the years spanning birth to age eight.

According to Jacobson (2011), evidence suggests preschool and early elementary classrooms and educators often do not engage in collaborative practices that lead to smooth transitions for students entering kindergarten through third grade. Research-based approaches to planning, implementing, and evaluating preschool to grade three approaches have been discovered and shared with early education systems across the United States in an effort to better serve students and families (National League of Cities, 2012). Minnesota's Department of Education developed a Regional PreK-3 Leadership Workshop in the fall of 2018, to train Minnesota's educational leaders on the impact of a PreK-3 system where "all Minnesota children are ready for schools and schools are ready for children, communities have an aligned PreK through 12 continuous improvement model inclusive of early care and education programs, and all third graders are reading at grade level" (Minnesota Department of Education, 2020c). Although Minnesota's Department of Education incorporated Kauerz and Coffman's (2013) "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating PreK-3rd Grade Approaches" in statewide trainings for schools, few studies regarding the understanding and use of the eight key components and their relationship in the transfer pathway to establishing a successful and comprehensive preschool–grade 3 continuum (in Minnesota) have been found.

The purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) key components in a Minnesota PreK-3rd grade aligned public school system. Attainment of an aligned educational structure in grades PreK through third is achievable when systems

utilize the research and implement the research-based approaches with fidelity. The goal of this research was to examine: 1) which of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight components for P-3 approaches a school system chose to implement; 2) the factors stakeholders reported influenced or inhibited the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight components; 3) the student benefits stakeholders noticed since implementing components of the P-3 approach; and, 4) the recommendations stakeholders offered future implementors of the P-3 approach practices.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following four research questions:

1. Of the eight components of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches," what factors led the district/schools to choose the components they are implementing?
2. What factors do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians report either promote or inhibit the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight practices?
3. What benefits do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians report they have observed in students since implementing practices of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) P-3 approach?
4. What recommendations do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians provide for schools interested in implementing Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework in their P-3 programs?

Research Design

This study utilized a case study methodology. Unlike traditional evaluations that presume programs are implementing components that are rational, predictable, and measurable, case study

evaluations treat program implementations as a compilation of events and strategies that impact the outcomes. “A case study evaluation allows greater latitude in seeing out and assessing program impacts” (Balbach, 1999, p. 5).

A qualitative method of research design was utilized to evaluate and examine the level to which the key approaches of Kaurez and Coffman’s (2019) research are being understood and supported in PreK through third grade classrooms in a Minnesota public school district. Qualitative research most closely aligns with process-oriented frameworks and evaluations (Roberts, 2010) and was utilized during principal interviews, an early childhood coordinator interview, a community education director interview, former and current superintendent interviews, and teacher and parent/guardian focus groups. A review of organizational documents, including mission and vision statements and referendum information was completed prior to the interviews and focus group discussions. Regarding qualitative research methods, The Administration of Children and Families (2016) state, “Data often are collected in the settings under study, and they aim for rich description of complex ideas or processes, albeit typically across a limited number of individuals or settings” (p. 4).

Human Subject Approval

The preliminary proposal was accepted by the researcher’s doctoral committee in Spring, 2020. After acceptance, the researcher submitted an application (Appendix D) to St. Cloud State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the conduction of research. The application indicated the project title, principal investigator, type of research, IRB training completion verification, research abstract, research questions, research design, participant demographics, compensation details, data collection and storage plan, anticipated benefits and risks of the research, and informed consent information. IRB approval was received in April, 2020 and the

process of communicating with a district regarding setting up interviews for this study began shortly after.

Prior to the interviews and focus group meetings, all participants gave written consent via an IRB-approved informed consent form (Appendix E). Signed copies of the informed consent forms were emailed back to the researcher and will be retained for three years in accordance with statute 45 CFR 46.116. The informed consent process included the following steps:

1. Presentation of information that enabled the individual to knowledgeably and voluntarily decide whether or not to participate as a research subject;
2. Documentation of consent with a written form to be signed by the subject;
3. Responses to the subject's questions/concerns were offered during the research, and the researcher was prepared for any new findings that may affect the subject's willingness to continue participating.

Participant Selection

This study elicited the perspectives of elementary principals, an early childhood coordinator, a community education director, a past and current superintendent, teachers in grade levels PreK–3rd grade, and parents/guardians of students in grades PreK-1 in a Minnesota school district. Convenience samples were used to select a school district. "Convenience samples are drawn when other sampling is not practical and one can get reasonably good information from units that are easy to locate" (Balbach, 1999, p. 7). The selection of the Minnesota school district was determined after contacting St. Cloud State University's Office of Clinical Experiences to obtain a list of districts the university partners with for early childhood student teaching placements. The selected school district, schools, and its faculty were determined by meeting the criteria below:

- Minnesota school district with no more than three elementary schools;
- Building principals who have been in their roles for at least 2 years;
- Early childhood coordinators who have been in their roles for at least 2 years;
- Teachers who have taught in their current grade levels for at least 2 years and can include at least one teacher representative at each grade level–PreK, kindergarten, first-, second-, and third grade;
- Parents/Guardians who have at least one student who has participated in PreK, kindergarten, and first grade in the district.

After obtaining the list of potential districts and ensuring the aforementioned criteria was met, the researcher emailed a district in which a collegial relationship between the superintendent and researcher was already established to inquire about potential participation in this study. Initially, email correspondences were exchanged between the superintendent and researcher to begin the process of establishing administrator, teacher, and parent/guardian contacts for individual interviews and focus groups. The superintendent emailed the district's early childhood coordinator, elementary principals, and community education director to request their participation. A shared document was created by the researcher in Google Docs and shared with the superintendent who imported the email contact information for the administrative participants.

Each administrator was contacted via email to schedule an individual virtual interview. Individual administrative interviews consisted of interviewing the community education director, early childhood coordinator, previous superintendent, current superintendent, early childhood/kindergarten principal, and the two principals of the district's two grade one through five schools. Upon completion of these interviews, administrators added the names of teachers

and parents/guardians who would participate in the respective focus groups to the shared document. After all teachers' and parents'/guardians' contact information was added to the document, group emails requesting focus group participation were sent by the researcher to the teacher group and parent/guardian group. Focus group interviews for the teachers and parents/guardians were conducted on Zoom®, a web-based video communications platform. All participants who were unfamiliar with Zoom® were presented with an opportunity to meet via phone with the researcher prior to their interview or focus group meeting for a tutorial to become familiar with the video communications platform.

For the purpose of maintaining anonymity of the study participants, each administrative subject was identified by their assigned role in the school district, and teachers were identified by assigned letters for coding purposes. The roles and codes are as follows:

- Community Education Director. This administrator oversaw all of the early childhood and community education programming and staff during this study. This director served in this role during the transition to the PreK-K and 1-5 buildings.
- Early Childhood Coordinator. During the study, this administrator oversaw the daily early childhood classroom needs, as well as consulted with the community education director regarding scheduling early childhood classes. This coordinator served as an interim coordinator and did not have any prior leadership experience.
- Early Learning Principal. This administrator served as the principal of the PreK and Kindergarten building during the study. During the transition to the PreK-K and 1-5 buildings, this principal served as the district's assistant superintendent.

- Former Superintendent. This administrator served as superintendent during the time of the district transformation discussed in the study.
- Current Superintendent. This administrator served as the district's superintendent during the study. During the time of the district transformation discussed in this study, this administrator served as the incoming principal of the newly developed early learning building.
- Elementary Principal A. During the study, this administrator served as principal of one of the district's two elementary schools (grades 1-5) and during the time of the district's transition to the PreK-K and 1-5 buildings.
- Elementary Principal B. This administrator served as principal of one of the district's two elementary schools (grades 1-5) during the study. This administrator served as the district's curriculum director during the transition period discussed in this study.
- Teachers A-J–Classroom Teachers. These teachers represented grade levels PreK through 3rd grade in the school district.
- Parents A-E–Parents. These parents had students in grades PreK through 1st grade in the school district.

Instrumentation

An interview question matrix was developed to ensure each of the four phases are considered in the forming of the interview and focus group questions. Milagros Castillo-Montoya (2016) developed an interview protocol refinement (IPR) framework to assist in the preparation of interview research. The four-phase process includes:

1. Ensuring interview questions align with research questions;
2. Constructing an inquiry-based conversation;

3. Receiving feedback on interview matrix and questions; and
4. Piloting the interview questions.

The interview questions were developed by the researcher, using Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework for guidance and sought to gain information about the participants' perceived knowledge and opinion of the implementation of the framework's components. Open-ended questions, specific to each component of the framework, were developed by the researcher and typed into a question matrices to facilitate the interviews and to assist in determining the alignment of the research questions (Appendix A). The community education director, interim early childhood coordinator, three elementary principals, two superintendents, and the teachers were given and supplied statements to each question in every component of the matrices, while the parent/guardian focus group participants were asked to respond only to the cross-sector work, instructional tools, data-driven improvement, engaged families, and continuity and pathways components, as determined by the Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework. Testing of the questions was conducted by an early childhood professor at St. Cloud State University. After approval from the university professor, the questions and matrix were shared with doctoral committee members and doctoral cohort members for analysis, evaluation, and pilot testing (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). With the feedback received from committee and cohort members, adjustments were made to increase the clarity of the interview questions. Participants of the study met with the researcher on Zoom®, as in-person communication was restricted due to state quarantine regulations surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Google Slides presentations (Appendix B and C) were created by the researcher specific for the two focus group discussions to provide a visual of the questions being asked and to guide our time together.

Treatment of Data / Data Analysis

The administrator interviews and the focus group interviews of parents/guardians and teachers were recorded on Zoom® and transcribed via either Zoom® or Descript®. A notepad was used for occasional notetaking, however most of the data was captured electronically with Zoom's® recording feature. The typed transcription was modified by the researcher to accurately reflect the conversation and correct any transcription errors. The researcher sent a copy of the respective transcriptions containing the individual comments of each participant and the researcher to the individuals involved in the corresponding interviews and focus groups. Each participant received an opportunity to edit or omit any of their comments to accurately reflect their thoughts and opinions. After the researcher received the edited transcriptions or approval of the original transcriptions from each participant, the video recording of the interview or focus group was deleted. Typed transcriptions were deleted from the researcher's computer and paper copies were shredded after earning the doctoral degree.

Upon receiving the approved transcriptions from each participant, the researcher coded each transcribed document to begin the process of accurately reporting the findings of this study. Codes were developed using both deductive and inductive processes. Direct quotes from interviews were used with permission from the interviewees. Individual identities of participants were not revealed.

Each statement from the individual participants was initially coded to reflect the research question supported. The following notations were used: research question 1 (RQ1); research question 2 (RQ2); research question 3 (RQ3); and research question 4 (RQ4). The next phase of coding involved noting which component of the framework was addressed. Each component was assigned a code: cross-sector work (C1); administrator effectiveness (C2); teacher effectiveness

(C3); instructional tools (C4); learning environment (C5); data-driven improvement (C6); engaged families (C7); and continuity and pathways (C8). The third phase of coding consisted of typing all of the participants' statements into a spreadsheet to begin discovering common themes among the statements. After the themes emerged, the researcher grouped similar statements from each of the participants under each theme to determine the number of occurrences presented throughout the study. The final stage of coding consisted of calculating each of the themes in the research question categories to determine the total number of statements provided. These calculations resulted in determining which factors were the most and least significant in this study.

Procedure and Timeline

The researcher's Preliminary Defense was conducted in late March 2020. Shortly after, a list of potential school districts was obtained from the Office of Clinical Experiences at St. Cloud State. IRB gave approval to conduct this study in April 2020. In May 2020, the district was contacted to begin setting dates for interviews and focus group discussions. Consent forms were sent to participants one to two days prior to their interview or focus group.

All of the qualitative data gathered in response to the interviews and focus groups was conducted in May and June of 2020. The data was obtained in the following phases:

Phase I: Qualitative. Principal, Early Childhood Coordinator, Community Education Director, Previous Superintendent, and Current Superintendent interviews

Phase II: Qualitative. Focus group interviews of teachers

Phase III: Qualitative. Focus group interviews of parents/guardians

Data were transcribed following the completion of the interviews and focus groups, then sent to each participant for review. Data were coded and analyzed during the summer of 2020. Transcribed documents were coded to sort statements by themes or categories.

Summary

This chapter outlined the research approach and methodology used to examine the implementation of PreK-Grade 3 alignment approaches in a Minnesota public school system. The rationale for the selection of participants was detailed and the protocols for developing the instrumentation were explained. The process for coding and analyzing the data was described along with the timeline of the study. Chapter IV will provide the study's findings and provide a synthesis of participant responses.

Chapter IV: Results

Introduction

In 2019, Dr. Kristie Kauerz and her colleague, Julia Coffman, updated their original 2013 "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating PreK-3rd Grade Approaches" to effectively enhance the quality of young children's learning experiences from birth through third grade. Kauerz and Coffman (2019) identified eight key practices that assist in establishing successful and comprehensive preschool through third grade school systems:

- creating collaborative mechanisms;
- ensuring that administrators are instructional leaders;
- empowering teachers to focus on instruction and teamwork;
- aligning standards, curricula and assessments;
- establishing a student-centered learning environment;
- relying on data to improve instruction and guide reform;
- engaging families; and
- moving children along a high-quality pathway (Jacobson, 2011).

With the implementation of these eight practices, the positive impact of a PreK-3rd grade aligned continuum is more likely to benefit students, teachers, administrators, parents, community stakeholders and school systems (Jacobson, 2011). While this framework is beginning to be introduced into state education systems across the nation, it is not a widely-held expectation nor is it a framework schools are familiar with and prepared to integrate into their local educational systems. Therefore, educating state and local school systems on the use of this PreK through 3rd grade framework is essential.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) key components in a Minnesota PreK-3rd grade aligned public school system. The components of the framework examined were:

- Cross sector work and the school system's ability to create collaborative mechanisms within the community;
- Administrator effectiveness and the school system's ability to ensure its administrators are instructional leaders;
- Teacher effectiveness and the school system's ability to empower teachers to focus on instructional practices and teamwork;
- Instructional tools and the school system's ability to align standards, curricula, and assessments;
- Learning environment and the school system's ability to establish student-centered learning spaces;
- Data-driven improvement and the school system's ability to rely on data-driven improvement to guide and improve instruction and reform;
- Family engagement and the school system's ability to develop effective relationships with family stakeholders; and
- Continuity and the school system's ability to transition children along high-quality pathways throughout their early childhood years.

Research Design

A case study, utilizing a qualitative program evaluation model, was used to gather information on a PreK through third grade approach in a school district in greater Minnesota. This case study has detailed descriptions from multiple viewpoints on the alignment of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight components. The factors promoting or inhibiting the implementation of these approaches, in addition to the perceived benefits, were researched. Finally, recommendations for future implementers of PreK-3rd grade alignment approaches were studied.

Qualitative research most closely aligns with process-oriented frameworks and evaluations (Roberts, 2010) and was utilized during principal, early childhood coordinator, former and current superintendent, and community education director interviews, and teacher and parent/guardian focus groups. A review of organizational documents, including mission and vision statements and referendum information occurred prior to the interviews. Regarding qualitative research methods, The Administration of Children and Families (2016) state, "Data often are collected in the settings under study, and they aim for rich description of complex ideas or processes, albeit typically across a limited number of individuals or settings" (p. 4).

Description of the Study Participants

A list of Minnesota public schools who were currently implementing the components of PreK through third grade approaches to aligning systems was requested from the Office of Clinical Experiences at St. Cloud State University. This study considered the perspectives of three elementary principals, an early childhood coordinator, a community education director, the previous and current superintendent, ten teachers representing grade levels PreK–3rd grade, and five parents/guardians of students in a Minnesota school district. A convenience sample was used to select this school district and its participants by meeting the following criteria:

- Minnesota school district with no more than three elementary schools;
- Building principals who had been in their roles for at least 2 years;
- Early childhood coordinators who had been in their roles for at least 2 years;
- Teachers who had taught in their current grade levels for at least 2 years and can include at least one teacher representative at each grade level–PreK, kindergarten, first, second, and third grade; and
- Parents/guardians who had at least one student who had participated in early childhood, kindergarten, and first grade in the district.

The district's current superintendent was initially contacted by the researcher via email to assess interest in and availability of participating in this study. After the superintendent agreed to participate, the elementary principals, early childhood coordinator, and community education director were presented with information about the study. Those administrators created a list of all teachers representing PreK, kindergarten, first, second, and third grades. The researcher emailed these teachers detailing information about the study and requesting their participation in this research. Additionally, a list of parents/guardians who have had children attend school in this district for a minimum of 2 years, including attendance during the preschool years, was determined and contacted by the school administration inviting them to participate. A follow-up email was sent by the researcher to the parents/guardians explaining the purpose of the study and thanking them for their willingness to participate.

After all participants agreed to engage in this study, dates were set to conduct focus group interviews for teachers and parents/guardians, and individual interviews for the administrators on Zoom®. At the time of this study, in-person interviews and group gatherings were prohibited due to quarantine guidelines surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the first interview,

the district's mission and vision, together with other published documents regarding the district's 2015 referendum proposal were requested and reviewed by the researcher. The principal, early childhood coordinator, community education director, and former and current superintendent interviews were conducted separately and followed a designed set of questions created by the researcher that corresponded to Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) components of PreK through third grade approaches and sought to answer the research questions. Additionally, the teacher focus group received the same questions, but responded in a small group Zoom® meeting of ten participants. The parent/guardian focus group also met on Zoom® in a small group setting of five participants and answered questions regarding their perceptions of the implementation of cross-sector work, instructional tools, data-driven improvement, engaged families, and continuity and pathways components. The researcher purposefully kept the sample size to seven individual interview participants and ten or less focus group participants since "large groups are difficult to control and they limit each person's opportunity to share insights and observations" (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 67).

For the purpose of maintaining anonymity of the study participants, each administrative subject was identified by their assigned role in the school district, and teachers and parents were identified by assigned letters for coding purposes. The roles and codes are as follows:

- Community Education Director. This administrator oversaw all of the early childhood and community education programming and staff during this study. This director served in this role during the transition to the PreK-K and 1-5 buildings.
- Early Childhood Coordinator. During the study, this administrator oversaw the daily early childhood classroom needs, as well as consulted with the community education

director regarding scheduling early childhood classes. This coordinator served as an interim coordinator and did not have any prior leadership experience.

- Early Learning Principal. This administrator served as the principal of the PreK and Kindergarten building during the study. During the transition to the PreK-K and 1-5 buildings, this principal served as the district's assistant superintendent.
- Former Superintendent. This administrator served as superintendent during the time of the district transformation discussed in the study.
- Current Superintendent. This administrator served as the district's superintendent during the study. During the time of the district transformation discussed in this study, this administrator served as the incoming principal of the newly developed early learning building.
- Elementary Principal A. During the study, this administrator served as principal of one of the district's two elementary schools (grades 1-5) and during the time of the district's transition to the PreK-K and 1-5 buildings.
- Elementary Principal B. This administrator served as principal of one of the district's two elementary schools (grades 1-5) during the study. This administrator served as the district's curriculum director during the transition period discussed in this study.
- Teachers A-J–Classroom Teachers. These teachers represented grade levels PreK through 3rd grade in the school district.
- Parents A-E–Parents. These parents had students in grades PreK through 1st grade in the school district.

The school district selected for this study was located in a greater Minnesota community. The district served students in five schools: an early learning building for PreK and Kindergarten students, two elementary schools for grades 1-5, a middle school for grades 6-8, and a high school for grades 9-12. This community's population included nearly 14,000 residents. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), the racial demographics of this community, in 2019, was comprised of 90.6% White residents and 7.7% Hispanic or Latino residents. Black or African American residents made up 1.2% of this community's population.

Research Questions

This chapter reports the findings of the study, which was guided by a set of research questions that were developed by the researcher and based on the Kauerz and Coffman (2019) "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches" and additional literature. The study had four guiding questions to lead the evaluation and were directly aligned with the selected conceptual framework theory. The guiding research questions were:

1. Of the eight components of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches," what factors led the district/schools to choose the components they are implementing?
2. What factors do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians report either promote or inhibit the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight practices?
3. What benefits do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians report they have observed in students since implementing practices of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) P-3 approach?

4. What recommendations do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians provide for schools interested in implementing Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework in their P-3 programs?

Analysis of the data was completed independently by the researcher using various coding strategies detailed in Chapter III.

The first research question was intended to determine which components of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework were being implemented in the school district together with the factors that prompted the school system to choose the components for implementation.

Research Question 1

The first research question guiding this study focused on determining the factors leading districts to choose the P-3 components they are implementing in their systems.

Of the eight components of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches," what factors led the district/schools to choose the components they are implementing?

After briefly describing each of the eight components to the participants, the following question was asked in each interview and focus group: "Do you believe your district has addressed this component?" If respondents replied, *"yes,"* the following question was asked, "What factors, do you believe, prompted the district to choose to implement this component?" If respondents had replied, *"no,"* the researcher would have facilitated a discussion on the next component. Throughout all of the interviews and focus groups, there were no participants who replied, "no" to the aforementioned question. While the district did not use a framework to guide the implementation of P-3 alignment components, this district had addressed and implemented each of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) components. The level of implementation varied for each

component; however each study participant confirmed all eight components had been addressed in this school system. The data from these responses directly supported the first research question.

Participants' responses were categorized into five overarching factor themes: budget, buy-in of core mission, curriculum, data-driven decisions, and leadership. The statements were calculated and totaled for each theme to determine the number and percentage of statements in each themed category as depicted in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Factors Leading the School/District to Choose to Implement Components of a P-3 Framework

Factor Themes	Number of Statements	Percentage of Statements
Curriculum	71	29%
Leadership	65	26%
Buy-in of core mission	57	23%
Data-driven decisions	44	18%
Budget	9	4%
Total	246	100%

The study participants provided two hundred forty-six statements regarding factors they believed prompted the district to choose to implement each of the eight components of Kauerz & Coffman's (2019) framework during the interviews and focus group discussions.

Curriculum. Curriculum emerged as a significant factor for choosing to implement components of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework. Seventy-one statements (29%) from the interviews and focus groups revealed curricular-based factors prompted district leaders and teachers to implement components deemed effective for P-3 alignment. As reported by participants of the study, this district incorporated many curricula and assessment systems in grades PreK-3: Creative Curriculum, Pyramid Model, and Teaching Strategies GOLD for the

preschool grade levels, Handwriting without Tears, and Second Step in preschool and kindergarten grade levels, and Benchmark Literacy and Houghton Mifflin's Math Expressions in kindergarten–third grade. As the district adopted these instructional tools, training, alignment discussions and planning were employed for successful implementation, as reported by participants of the study.

The early learning principal and current superintendent stated the importance of state standards and the use of curricula as "tools." The current superintendent elaborated by stating,

> One of my pet peeves in education is we think the books that we buy from Houghton Mifflin is the be all end all, when really it all starts with the standard and then you go from there. We are getting close to having those tools be more a part of the culture in kindergarten, but we're not quite there. But when they arrive together (the standards and curriculum), then we will have made it.

Leadership. Sixty-five statements (26%) from administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians determined leadership to be a significant factor for choosing to implement P-3 alignment components. Statements revealed the district's administrative/leadership team consisted of multiple educational leaders selected to impact and guide buildings, teachers, families, and students. The early childhood building is composed of early childhood students in grades PreK-kindergarten. Students range in ages from birth-6 years. The community education director mentioned Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) and Adult Basic Education (ABE) are also housed in this school, in addition to a number of community resources, including Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and Head Start. While there is an administrator that oversees all of the building logistics and serves as the principal of early childhood and kindergarten, there are additional administrators that serve alongside this administrator.

The community education director directly oversees the birth–PreK teaching and support staff in addition to all community education staff in the district. This role is further supported in this building by an early childhood coordinator who supports the early childhood teaching staff on a day-to-day basis. In Fall 2019, the early childhood coordinator re-located and was replaced by an interim coordinator who most recently served as a classroom teacher in the district's PreK program. Because of this shift in leadership, the principal of the early learning building commented on the importance of a strong and aligned leadership team when reflecting on a conversation with the early childhood coordinator. "You and I are going to be interchangeable parts. We are not desk people, we are people that respond to needs." The early learning principal commented about the importance of spending as much time in classrooms as possible and being present wherever support is needed. These administrators dress for student drop-off and pick-up each day and also rotate recess supervision duties. The notion of shared leadership and leading by example was exemplified in the early learning principal's philosophy of leadership. He was committed to serving the staff and students in his building by ensuring a leader was accessible at all times.

The study revealed the change in early childhood leadership was not the only factor leading this district to choose to implement components of P-3 alignment. This district's administrative team, led by the superintendent, meets frequently to gauge the climate and needs of the district, as mentioned by the current superintendent. The team recognizes the importance of being more than academic leaders by not only knowing the academic standards and integrating the best and most innovative programs and practices, but also balancing those with their philosophical priority of building strong and lasting relationships with all stakeholders.

Buy-in of Core Mission. "Every Kid, Every Day" is the core mission of staff and leaders in this school district as reported by the administrative and teacher participants. Fifty-seven statements (23%) revealed participants share a belief in "doing what's best for kids." Statements supporting the core mission revealed "Every Kid, Every Day" is viewed as a path toward eliminating barriers for families and providing equitable opportunities for all students. The early learning principal spoke of the idea of building a center that meets the needs of every member of the district. The early learning principal stated,

> We visited neighboring districts to get ideas, yet we noticed no one was doing quite what we were thinking. We were falling in love with the concept of a Family Center. I wanted a school where kids could get dirty and sweaty, so I really tried to push play, being active, and getting outside to try new things.

The community education director, early learning principal, former superintendent and current superintendent discussed the idea of looking toward building a Family Center that not only supports the academic and social-emotional needs of the district's youngest learners, but also incorporates systems that support the entire family, such as medical, dental, and mental health care. The community education director said, "We aren't there yet, but we are building a system that can support it."

"Every Kid Every Day" also supported the idea of creating leaders in schools by giving children every opportunity to be their best selves. The early learning principal stated, "It's interesting that our kindergarten kids are the big kids, wherein most schools they're the little ones. Here, they're bold. We are trying to create leaders. We are making sure all children are getting multiple opportunities to be leaders." The idea of developing leaders was supported by Elementary Principal A sharing,

> I just think everything starts there [early learning building]. Having been a principal that had a kindergarten setting, there was a lot of pride in how we cared for those students; how our fourth and fifth graders took care of those students and watched them grow throughout the year. There is so much growth in kindergarten.

Every administrator agreed that it is essential for all teachers and administrators to remember what it's like to be around young learners and recall what learning looks like at the early learning level. Elementary Principal A said, "The biggest thing to know is that [early childhood] is the foundation. It's programming, assessments, and curriculum might have been looked at as just a starting point at one time or place, but everything from play to recess to the schedule to the cafeteria to developing responsibilities is all just as important to the work kids are going to do as they move up in elementary school."

Data-driven Decisions. Forty-four statements (18%) from participant interviews and focus groups revealed data-driven decision making was a factor in choosing to implement components of P-3 alignment. In the district's early childhood settings, teachers used to advise some parents to wait another year to enroll their child in kindergarten, without data to support the decision, if the teachers felt another year of preschool would benefit the child. The community education director said, "You have to justify to a parent if you're telling them their child shouldn't repeat a grade. You can't just rely on a gut feeling. How can we tell kids' parents that their child is ready or not ready if we're not using any data or using the data point to say, yes they are ready?" The district chose to implement Teaching Strategies GOLD (TS Gold) in PreK classrooms, and now uses it to make informed decisions regarding student progress and future instructional needs.

Budget. While budgetary factors only received nine statements (4%), the underlying message was essential to the foundation of the district choosing P-3 components to implement. Six out of the seven administrators interviewed mentioned the district's need for more space and the corresponding 2015 referendum request as substantial factors leading to the restructuring of the district's early childhood and elementary schools. This restructuring allowed for a reimagined system structure to support the needs of all students and the ability to develop a seamless transition system for students as they move through all grades.

The former superintendent recalled beginning the initial conversations regarding the school district's needs in 2011. These conversations included discussing the importance of PreK with the school board. "[PreK] is not an 'extra' anymore. It's not just something we do. We have PreK because it's part of our overall philosophy. We are no longer a 13-year system. We are a 15-, 16-, or 17-year system that is working with families and kids." The former superintendent developed an intentional and on-going conversation with the school board regarding the importance of early childhood education years before the referendum request was presented to the public. By 2015, the school board recognized investing in early education would have a positive and longer-lasting impact on the district than any other program investment. The former superintendent stated, "I can do programming at a high school level that will impact kids for two, three, maybe four years. But, if I program effectively at age three, I've got fifteen years of impact."

According to information gathered during the study, the referendum passed with nearly 71% of the votes affirming a tax increase for the community. This passing referendum allowed the district to restructure their schools to include: a PreK-kindergarten building to serve all of the district's early childhood and kindergarten students, two elementary schools serving students in

grades one through five, a middle school, and a high school. The former superintendent envisioned the newly created early learning and kindergarten building as a "Gateway" to the district's schools and resources. The vision of a "one-stop shop" was mentioned by the early learning administrators and current and former superintendents. "When you walk in the door, you know that this is a place for 3-year-olds through 6-year-olds. That's the gateway. That is the entry into our district. That is where we welcome them in, we make them part of who and what we are. This is where we become partners with them."

The district's former superintendent revealed the importance of keeping the district's vision "front and center." The former superintendent believes the mission and vision should also be in front of leaders as they are making decisions and developing strategic plans. "That becomes the filter for our decisions. So with every decision you make, you need to go back to that and run it through the filter. And if you're getting caught in that filter, then you have to question whether it's the right thing to do."

This district's leadership team developed a message to share with stakeholders about how the future of this district could look with the mission and vision in place and the new structure of early learning. The former superintendent said, "We wanted to make sure that everybody understood what this place was about. It was not just another school. It was not just where my kid goes to kindergarten. This has the potential to change how we educate kids in Minnesota." This superintendent recognized the need to create community buy-in for this district to begin its continuous efforts of improving and meeting the needs of all learners. The former superintendent stressed to the staff and community that this restructuring would not be another initiative. "This is not an initiative. This is a philosophy and a culture. It's not something you do and then move on to another initiative the next year."

Administrators continued to mention the potential of continuous engagement after welcoming families into the district by way of the early learning center. They believed that by establishing a structure that focused on early learning, they were developing a stronger system that would impact kids through high school. The former superintendent stated, “This was going to impact us all the way through because of the foundational work that we could do around those needs of our young kids. We needed something that wasn’t just going to get us by, but what would make a good impact for our district as a whole.” By choosing to focus on how the budgetary dollars would create the greatest impact, the district was now in a position to see the positive effects of their strategic decisions.

Research Question 2

The second research question focused on determining the factors assisting in or challenging the implementation of P-3 components in school systems.

What factors do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians report either promote or inhibit the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman’s (2019) eight practices?

After determining the district had implemented each of the components of Kauerz and Coffman’s (2019) framework and discussing the factors leading the district to choose the components they implemented, discovering the factors that promoted or inhibited the implementation was necessary. Participants’ responses regarding the factors promoting the implementation of P-3 components were categorized into five themes: communications and relationships with stakeholders, community partnerships and collaboration, curricular decisions, instructional alignment, and leadership decisions, as shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Factors Promoting the Implementation of Components of a P-3 Framework

Promoting Factor Themes	Number of Statements	Percentage of Statements
Curricular decisions	154	43%
Leadership decisions	89	26%
Communications and relationships with stakeholders	69	19%
Instructional alignment	25	7%
Community partnerships and collaborations	18	5%
Total	360	100%

The study participants shared three hundred sixty statements related to factors promoting the on-going implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight components. The factors participants' shared inhibited the implementation of P-3 components are listed in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Factors Inhibiting the Implementation of Components of a P-3 Framework

Inhibiting Factor Themes	Number of Statements	Percentage of Statements
Curricular decisions	47	38%
Leadership decisions	37	30%
Communications and relationships with stakeholders	20	16%
Instructional alignment	13	10%
Community partnerships and collaborations	7	6%
Total	124	100%

Table 4.3 displays the themes considered to be factors inhibiting the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight components of P-3 approaches based on participants' statements. While the inhibiting factors' themes remained the same as those promoting the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight components, there were one hundred

twenty-four statements, shared by the study participants, that revealed factors inhibiting the district's ability to implement P-3 components effectively.

The following information summarizes the promoting and inhibiting factors listed in Tables 4.2 and 4.3 related to P-3 component implementation.

Curricular Decisions. Based on the study results, curricular-based decisions were determined to be the leading factors that promoted or assisted in implementing components of a P-3 aligned approach. One hundred fifty-four statements (43%) revealed that decisions about curriculum and instruction were factors that promoted component integration. All participants shared about the weekly curricular meetings: grade-level meetings, professional learning communities (PLCs), staff meetings, and district-level, content-specific meetings. Participants found these meetings to be a valuable use of time to learn about the district's curricular decisions and share strategies and instructional methods with colleagues.

Administrators also strived to model effective practices in their staff meetings so that teachers could incorporate those into their instruction with students. Elementary Principal A recalls, "I saw [the former superintendent] modeling strategies in our leadership meetings that fourth graders were doing in class. He wasn't doing it because he thought that was best for us, necessarily, but he wanted us to pass those things along for our students." Administrators also mentioned the need to re-evaluate those instructional practices frequently to ensure they are indeed effective.

Administrators and teachers also discussed several trainings the district had recently provided that sought to enhance the district's ability to serve students well. These trainings were reported to consist of: Responsive Classroom, Pyramid Model, and Trauma-Informed Decision Making. While the PLC structure is not uniform across all buildings in the district, as mentioned

by the teachers participating in a focus group discussion, teachers and administrative leaders in every building except one supported and appreciated the PLC structure established in their respective schools, and they believe this implementation is positively affecting the learning and academic growth of the students.

Students and families in grades PreK-5 had been introduced to the Seesaw online learning management platform within the last two years to view assignments and curriculum-based skills and enhance communication among teachers, students, and families. This tool was deemed extremely valuable by all participants when the transition to distance learning occurred.

Forty-seven statements (38%) of study participants also revealed elements of curricular decisions inhibited the implementation of P-3 components. A distinct factor inhibiting curriculum during this study was the transition to distance learning. All participants considered the state's quick decision to move to distance learning at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to be a challenge as they were not prepared with technology for every student, nor was a system for online instruction in place. While Seesaw had been established as an online learning management platform for PreK-5 students and provided a means to communicate with families during this transition, the teachers' abilities to transform their practices to a virtual model was challenging.

Time was also an on-going factor inhibiting curricular decisions. Each administrator and every participant in the teacher focus group indicated the need for time to plan, align, and discuss the curriculum, effective teaching strategies, and student progress. Teachers also indicated time was a factor during assessments. Teachers revealed the amount of time dedicated to assessments significantly reduced the amount of instructional time they had with their students. Benchmark and progress monitoring assessments in grades PreK, 1, 2, and 3 are conducted by the classroom

teachers, while reading specialists facilitate kindergarten assessments. Teachers see the value in both models, but the majority preferred to assess their own students for comfortability and instant data access. Teachers also mentioned time is not always efficiently utilized by all teaching staff in grades PreK-third. While productive and collaborative conversations are a goal for all team meetings, the need for logistical-based decisions often occupies a majority of the team's time together.

Leadership Decisions. Leadership decisions were determined to be factors promoting component implementation as indicated by 89 statements (26%) of participants in this study. In the early stages of developing a new structure for the schools in this district, the former superintendent determined who the principal of the new early learning center (PreK-Kindergarten) would be when this building opened, as mentioned by all administrators during their interviews. At that time, the selected principal served as a co-principal in another elementary building in the district. The superintendent determined this principal would leave the elementary principal position mid-year to begin researching models of schools currently offering an early learning model similar to this district's vision, hire and train staff, and build a structure that embraced the "gateway" concept.

The district's shared leadership model also promoted the leadership decision-themed statements. Administrators, teachers, and parents recognized the balance of leadership in the early learning building. The early learning principal believed each school's leadership should be comprised of multiple stakeholders who work together to "plan staff development and share information." This administrator said,

> if we didn't do that, we could fall into silos really fast because even though we are all working in early childhood, we kind of have unique worlds where kindergarten does their

> thing and preschool does their thing. We have to be committed to not letting ourselves be over fragmented, so we try to connect as much as possible.

In this study, administrators did not believe they needed to be the "rulers" who made every decision nor did they need to have all the answers. They believed that communicating and collaborating allowed them to make sound decisions where all voices were heard.

The two elementary schools were each led by one of the district's two grade 1-5 principals, therefore shared leadership was not recognized by teachers and parents/guardians during the focus group discussions. However, Elementary Principal B did mention the importance of "all principals being on the same page." This administrator revealed that all PreK-5 administrators met weekly to stay connected and to understand each building's "game plan." "We don't need to be on the same page with everything, but there are some things, when kids go back and forth between buildings, that need to be the same."

All administrators and teachers recognized the leaders' abilities to inform stakeholders of decisions being made at administrative and school-based levels while staying focused on effective instructional strategies. These participants focused on Learning Walks (time for teachers to visit their colleagues' classrooms to learn new strategies and methods of effective instruction). Eight out of 10 teachers mentioned finding value in Learning Walks, especially when choosing which colleagues they would visit. Teacher D stated, "It is very valuable when we choose who we get to observe and what it is we will be seeing. Seeing my own students in their EL group or reading specialist or Title I group was extremely valuable to me." Teacher C mentioned, "You get to walk away with some good nuggets, things you can try, whether it be right away or even later on, or even a different year. You get to tuck that in your back pocket. I

think that's a luxury we have." In particular, teachers found value in conducting Learning Walks in classrooms with colleagues in their own grade level.

Administrators suggested staying active in the learning walk process as well. Elementary Principal A suggests, "Make sure you're not just watching teachers teach and providing feedback, but rather you're sticking to what an instructional leader does well. That is making sure the curriculum is up to date and the teachers have the resources they need, but you're also out there looking for what's new."

Leadership decisions were also viewed as barriers, as indicated by 37 statements (30%) of study participants. The district embraces a Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) model, yet each building supports a different framework. PreK and Kindergarten students follow the same PBIS structure and have established school "rules" and protocols that embrace safety, respect, and care for all learners and their learning environment. Students will learn a new PBIS structure and "rules" at each elementary school when they transition to first grade. Within the three buildings serving students in grades PreK-3rd grade, three different models of a PBIS framework are utilized. Administrators are aware of the differences in each of the building's models, and the teachers mentioned they struggle to recall their PBIS expectations as they are not frequently reviewed or enforced in their respective buildings.

At the beginning of the restructuring of buildings and programs in this district, it was determined that kindergarten would no longer be a part of each first–fifth-grade elementary building, but instead be housed at the early learning center to provide enough space and resources dedicated to early learning. The notion of this transition was not initially well-received by teachers of both kindergarten and first-grade students. Elementary Principal B stated,

> My first-grade teachers would tell you that separating kindergarten and first grade was a hard transition. They really did like having the kindergarten teachers in the building. They really liked touching base with them. They felt they knew a lot more about the kids coming up.

The former superintendent recognized this would be a challenge and set up a structure to help develop and guide the teachers toward seeing the potential value of this building and instructional model. “We were going to really change some people’s worlds. We had to take this brand new concept that nobody had really thought of and help people come to an understanding with it and become comfortable with it, while recognizing that there were going to be strong emotions from all stakeholders in the game.” The former superintendent acknowledged how he worked to create a picture in teachers’ minds detailing what this new building could mean for students and their future academic success by bringing them together and giving them opportunities to provide input. “I needed the group that I knew was going to have the most difficult time making the shift, the teaching staff, to be on board before I could roll this out to parents and the public.” There was a concern about parents not understanding the new model and structure and sharing their frustrations with teachers. If the teachers sympathized with these parents, there was an increased likelihood the referendum would fail. The former superintendent and his leadership team acknowledged the feelings of pain and loss these teachers were feeling and discussed the process of needing to grieve the loss but stressed the importance of not letting those emotions stop them “from getting where they needed to go.”

Communications and Relationships with Stakeholders. Sixty-nine statements (19%) indicated communicating and building relationships with all stakeholders was an important factor that promoted the implementation of components of the Kauerz and Coffman (2019)

framework. Every administrator, and 7 out of 10 teachers, mentioned the ability to know the students who are coming through the system as a significant factor promoting the implementation of components. This factor developed from learning about the students in each school by building strong and effective relationships and initiating instructional strategies that support the students' learning. Administrators agreed that when the relationships and effective strategies have been developed, and teachers share that information with the students' next grade-level teachers, increased student-engagement and academic learning can occur. Some of the data shared with teachers is communicated through assessment information placed in students' cumulative files by teachers at the end of the year, yet teachers and administrators agreed that giving teachers time to discuss student data with their colleagues is the most helpful.

Teacher and administrator communication with parents/guardians and students is also a factor promoting P-3 components' implementation. Six of the seven administrators indicated their abilities to communicate and build relationships with families is a vital part of their leadership role. Elementary Principal B recognized this is the weakest area of their leadership, but strongly believes it is critical for teachers to be the central communicators of information between school and families. The early learning principal recalls how he had called students to personally wish them a "happy birthday" during distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, since he could not see them in person.

> Our young students are off to a good start with how they view the school leaders. This is their first experience with a school principal. They start to see [the principal] as the person who keeps us safe. It's the person who my teachers go to for help. It's the person who does a little bit of everything. The person who makes me laugh and gets to know my name.

Three of the administrators stated they believed parents want a principal who is "down to earth, laughs with them, and gets to know their kids."

The parent/guardian focus group also mentioned the importance of communication from administrators and teachers to the students' families. Parents agreed the most detailed information they receive about their child's progress is during parent-teacher conferences. Parent B stated, "If I have specific questions, I've always felt like I can reach out to a teacher with questions and get a good response, but usually a discussion is just something that happens at conferences." Parent D shared that their communication with teachers depended on the teacher's style and willingness to engage in conversation.

While communications and relationships with stakeholders were mostly viewed as factors promoting P-3 component implementation, 20 statements (16%) from stakeholders indicated this factor inhibits implementation. Although the majority of teachers appreciated knowing information about the students entering their classrooms at the beginning of the school year as gathered from student assessments and the relationships built with students, families, and previous teachers, there was a small percentage of teachers who did not wish to know this information. These teachers cited the "clean slate" mentality, where a previous year's teacher's opinions and knowledge of a student could potentially taint the relationship-building process of the new teacher. This belief was supported by the early learning principal "except where things absolutely need to be passed along." Additionally, while teachers in the next grade level could gather data on their incoming students from the children's cumulative files, many teachers were either reluctant to or unaware of the contents stored in these portfolios.

Instructional Alignment. Twenty-five statements (7%) indicated that horizontal and vertical alignment discussions were factors that promoted component implementation in this

school system. Teachers and administrators primarily focused on the importance of giving teachers time to speak with and learn from the grade levels above and below their current teaching placement. These opportunities allowed for sharing and small group planning. The early learning principal stated he believed in constantly sharing ideas. “I don’t really tolerate not sharing. And we have an agreement that if you’re going to do something special and unique, we want all of our kids to have an opportunity.” All administrators agreed that having alignment discussions provided an opportunity to fully understand the skills students acquired at the end of each grade level. Elementary Principal A stated,

> We need to be having laddering conversations regularly. That’s not something we should ever miss out on. We should be informing our colleagues of what can be expected from the incoming class, especially as we continue to dig into standards and assessments and everything else that goes along with making that transition.

Teachers A, H, and I believe their grade levels’ instruction is aligned and similar in each classroom. Teacher I commented, “I feel like distance learning is actually giving us a chance to see how our colleagues are teaching because we are sharing lessons.” Teacher A agreed and described the value of hearing their colleagues’ choices of words and phrases during their instruction and believed it was enhancing their instructional strategies. Teacher B commented on their grade level’s curriculum map and how it helped guide teachers’ planning of curricular content.

The community education director and early childhood coordinator mentioned the variety of school day options for PreK students, including 2-day, 3-day, 4-day, and full-day programming, giving families many offerings and the ability to choose the model that works best for them. The community education director also discussed the integration of childcare into the

early learning and elementary buildings. When students are not in class, families can enroll their child in the district's childcare programs at the early learning building and both elementary school sites, therefore decreasing the need for families to locate accessible childcare for their children. Since childcare is viewed as an extension of the students' school days, discussions regarding curriculum and student expectations frequently occur among some of the administrators, teachers, support staff, and childcare providers.

Thirteen statements (10%) from the study participants reveal factors in instructional alignment can also inhibit P-3 components' integration. The PreK teachers' abilities to engage all levels of learners in the same content and skills is one of the challenges mentioned by each administrator in the early learning building. The PreK programming's flexible options put restraints on the time available to teach the necessary skills and content to all preschool-aged students; therefore the instruction occurring in each of the PreK classrooms tends to vary greatly. Teacher C believes preschool instruction is not fully aligned. "It seems like we're pretty scattered. I think preschool might be a little bit more unique. However, because we have so many different models, especially those with Head Start regulations, our expectations have to be different. You have to be really intentional of what you're going to teach."

All administrators mentioned the barriers of the state's early childhood statute language. Minnesota's definition of "teacher," as it pertains to preschool teachers, inhibits the implementation of instructional alignment in early learning environments. Currently, Minnesota does not require a teaching license to teach preschool in public school settings. While this district will only hire teachers with teaching degrees and the associated licensure, the selection pool of high-quality early childhood educators is diminishing. Teachers with the Birth to 3rd Grade teaching license in Minnesota often select teaching positions in grades kindergarten–third as the

pay is substantially increased from that of an early childhood educator. The former superintendent said, “And that's where the state of Minnesota needs to catch up and fund us properly so that we can treat them like we treat everybody else because the dollars just aren’t there to do it for the way things are.” The early learning principal mentioned that early learning teachers often feel like “second-class citizens” due to the variations in contractual language. “We’re equal. We need amazing preschool teachers and it’s hard to always keep the climate high when early childhood teachers’ paychecks are smaller and they are doing the same work; and in some cases they are working harder.”

Similar to a factor inhibiting communication and relationships with stakeholders, without viewing students’ data ahead of children entering their next grade level, the community education director and Elementary Principal B believe teachers are running the risk of repeating instruction the students have already mastered in the previous grade. Administrators noted observing this occurrence frequently in their buildings as well as a lack of engagement among students who are already beyond that level of instruction.

Community Partnerships and Collaborations. Community partnerships and collaborations received eighteen statements (5%) from study participants promoting the implementation of P-3 components. Administrators noted the regulations Head Start enforces in all of their early learning programs promote alignment between the district’s public preschool and the Head Start programming. While Head Start occupies space in the district’s early learning building, the Head Start classes are integrated with the public preschool full-day class offerings at this PreK-Kindergarten school. These regulations have caused the district to increase the use of quality assessments, adopt curricula, and provide on-going and high-quality training for all teaching and support staff. Due to the efficient alignment with Head Start, this district’s

superintendent has been requested to speak nationally about this partnership and its on-going collaboration. Teachers also noted the school's partnership with a local church and the rotary club that provided school programs with resources and volunteers.

Additionally, the transition of parent/guardian participation in the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) in early childhood to elementary was noted to be consistent by the administrators, teachers, and parents involved in this study. Parents who have been involved in their child's early childhood PTO were seeking involvement in the elementary PTO as their child transitioned to the next grade level. All of the study's participants indicated that parents involved in their child's schooling at a young age seemed to stay invested as their children grew up in their school system. Parents agreed that PTO meetings were heavily attended at the early learning building because there was a natural inclination for parents to want to be involved.

Parent burn-out was suggested by both the parent/guardian and teacher focus groups as a possible inhibiter of component implementation. While the participants in both groups indicated that parents involved in their child's education at a young age tended to stay invested as their children transitioned to older grades, they also indicated that those parents were often "stretched too thin." Parents noted seeing the same parents involved in each school-based activity. "They are volunteering in the school and taking on positions in the PTO. They're also the leaders in Cub Scouts or Girl Scouts, and then it becomes hard because you get burned out when you're doing everything." These participants agreed that their schools and communities needed to increase engagement among families enrolled in the school system to take the burden off the consistent volunteers.

Seven statements (6%) revealed community partnerships and collaborations to be factors that are inhibiting the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight components.

Funding from both state and local collaborators remains a significant barrier to the implementation of all components. All administrators agreed that without adequate funding, limitations on the amount and quality of programming were present.

Research Question 3

The third research question determined the perceived benefits students obtained from the implementation of P-3 components in their school systems.

What benefits do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians report they have observed in students since implementing practices of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) P-3 approach?

After determining the factors promoting and inhibiting the implementation of P-3 components, the study participants shared the overall benefits they perceived students gain from an aligned P-3 system. Participants' statements were organized into two themes: educational benefits and family benefits, as indicated in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Student Benefits from the Implementation of Components of a P-3 Framework

Benefit Themes	Number of Statements	Percentage of Statements
Educational benefits	138	82%
Family benefits	30	18%
Total	168	100%

The study participants shared one hundred sixty-eight statements revealing the benefits they believed were gained by implementing components of a P-3 framework.

Educational Benefits. One hundred thirty-eight statements (82%) revealed an educational benefit to P-3 aligned approaches being integrated into this school system. A few factors were suggested by all participants in this study: research-based and effective instructional

practices, a shared and common language among all grade levels, and consistent routines. Participants agreed that the instruction students were receiving was grounded in best-practices and allowed for impactful and research-based instructional strategies to be implemented, therefore increasing the opportunity to give each student the instruction they needed to be successful. Administrators frequently mentioned the district's mission of "Every Kid, Every Day" and that it is a shared mindset that this district consistently puts the belief of "what is best for students" at the forefront. The former superintendent stated he believed the mission is in direct alignment with the notion of "meeting every kid where they are, meeting every parent where they are, and creating what they need when there's a gap." The current superintendent supported these statements when discussing the idea of "taking back education" and looking more closely at the developmental appropriateness of education.

Each administrator, teacher, and parent/guardian in the interviews and focus groups mentioned the importance of using common language and vocabulary terminology by each teacher in every grade level. Elementary Principal A shared, "the consistency and commonality of our academic language provides a foundation for our students and teachers to build on." Administrators shared that ensuring the language is consistent throughout the whole school district will prevent sending mixed messages to students and their families. Parents appreciated the consistency and felt they understood the content and strategies being taught to their children.

All administrators stressed how school routines for students are being built at every school and grade level. Administrators and teachers commented on the students' abilities to enter and exit school, follow classroom procedures and expectations, and become independent learners in school environments as factors in school routines that benefit students. The early childhood coordinator and early learning principal discussed the likelihood that students and families would

attend the early learning building for multiple years, especially if students attend two years of preschool and one year of kindergarten. The former superintendent understood the new building structure would create a new transition from kindergarten to first grade, however this administrator felt confident in the system's ability to manage this transition well. "We knew there were going to be some challenges because now you didn't have the natural connection to first grade that you used to have. But I felt that as we teach kids to 'do school,' they already know how by the time they go to first grade." Teachers agreed that kindergarten is a time of routine-building. Teacher H stated, "Having a clear routine really makes students excited for the day." Teacher E corroborated the notion of routine building as students move into first grade. This teacher shared that when students transition to a new building, "it's almost like they're kindergartners all over again, so the first thirty days is just routines: how to sit on the floor and what should student work look like in first grade." Parents believed their children's transition from preschool to kindergarten was smooth, due to their students staying in the same building and being familiar with the staff.

Students' overall happiness, sense of belonging, and comfortability with school were also viewed as educational benefits by all study participants. Teacher B said, "I need the children in my class to absolutely love school within the first two weeks. So building that relationship with them and just making them love what they're doing is what's most important." Administrators agreed with this sentiment and shared that fostering relationships comes before integrating academics.

Family Benefits. Thirty statements (18%) by study participants revealed family benefits are achieved from the implementation of P-3 components. All participants agreed that family engagement was crucial to student learning and success. Six of the seven administrators

mentioned Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) as a component of P-3 aligned school systems that supports the families' connection and engagement to increase student success throughout the students' educational careers.

Building community schools where services meet the needs of both students and families remains an ever-growing goal for this school district as determined by the administrative participants during their individual interviews. Many services were integrated into the early learning building that supported families: WIC, Head Start, ABE, ESL, ECFE, and childcare. The community education director, early learning principal, former superintendent, current superintendent, and Elementary Principal A commented on the need to continue to provide these types of services to further remove barriers that are limiting the engagement and overall health and well-being of the families served in this district. The community education director and early childhood coordinator described providing home visits to families enrolled in ECFE and Preschool as a way of connecting with families who traditionally are difficult to reach and may not have a positive image of schools. This service allowed teachers to connect with the parents of early childhood students, build positive relationships, and provide educational resources and suggestions. Parents were equipped with effective parenting strategies, while simultaneously assisting in developing a positive and reliable impression of what this school system provides for its students and families.

Parents also noted their growth in understanding the teachers' expectations of students as they have had more children transition through the school system. Parents' assumptions regarding the acquired essential skills of their first child attending kindergarten versus their second, third, or fourth child varied greatly. Parent H shared, "I believed my child needed to

know his ABCs, 123s, and shapes, where now I understand that creativity and my child's social-emotional skills are what matter when determining school readiness."

Research Question 4

The fourth research question determined the recommendations P-3 aligned school systems have for future implementers of P-3 programs.

What recommendations do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians provide for schools interested in implementing Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework in their P-3 programs?

The final questions presented to administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians during the interviews and focus groups required determining the recommendations these participants had for future implementors of P-3 components. Participants' statements were organized into four significant themes: effective leadership, data-driven and effective teachers, connections with families, and effective communication systems. Each of these themes are indicated in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Recommendations to Schools/Districts Implementing Components of a P-3 Framework

Recommendation Themes	Number of Statements	Percentage of Statements
Effective leadership	58	57%
Data-driven, effective teachers	32	32%
Connection with families	6	6%
Effective communication systems	5	5%
Total	101	100%

The study participants shared one hundred one statements revealing recommendations for future implementers of P-3 components.

Effective Leadership. Fifty-eight statements (57%) revealed leadership effectiveness was key to the successful implementation and alignment of P-3 components, and was highly

recommended for future implementers by all participants. Administrators giving teachers time to meet and discuss students and their data was most often indicated by participants as a recommendation for success.

While time remained a significant recommendation, the notion of moving slowly through the implementation process was also suggested by all administrators. Elementary Principal B mentioned, “go slow to go fast” to ensure a thoughtful and successful implementation of P-3 components. While discussing the timeline for the district’s restructuring and referendum, the former superintendent stated, “You can’t go too fast. You have to let the process play out. You need to let people come to something like this organically. They have to come there themselves. I don’t know that [the referendum] would have been successful if we had forced the issue.” The initial discussions regarding the need for more learning spaces in the district resulted in administration taking the time to think about what structure would create the greatest impact. The former superintendent told his staff, “We have an opportunity to do and create something different.” They began looking at research and the best-practice models for early education. “I talked about my belief system that preschool programming is no longer an optional piece. We know that when kids walk into kindergarten having had rich experiences based in quality, research-based programming, those students come in at a much different level than those without preschool experiences.” These leaders took the time to carefully consider their philosophy and restructuring options when a future referendum passed.

Participants also indicated that a school leader’s ability to make social and emotional learning a priority for all students is essential. Teachers believed their administrators had fostered a structure that embraced the students’ social and emotional health. Teacher J shared that their students are more ready to learn when they are socially and emotionally secure. “If they’re not

emotionally available to you when they come into school, there's nothing you're going to be able to do to get through to that child." The early learning principal and Elementary Principal A, as well as the teachers participating in this study, mentioned the early learning and two elementary buildings would be adding a social-emotional teacher to their staff during the 2020-2021 school year. This teacher would be the conduit for the students transitioning from kindergarten to first grade throughout the school district.

Reallocating funds to support early childhood education in districts was also recommended for school leaders by interview and focus group participants. As previously mentioned, state and local funds are limited and often are not directly allocated for early learning, leaving districts with challenging scenarios when hiring and retaining early learning teachers and staff. Elementary Principal A believes, "If you're going to put your attention somewhere in order to make a strong school system, you should put your attention and funds into early childhood."

Additionally, school leaders with strong backgrounds in early education was recommended by participants. The former superintendent, current superintendent, and Elementary Principal B commented on the lack of early learning knowledge among the administrative leadership team. They believed having a leader with a strong background in early childhood education and child development would have been an asset at the beginning of the planning and restructuring process and while continuing to move the district forward.

Data-driven, Effective Teachers. Having effective data-driven teachers was a significant recommendation, as indicated by thirty-two statements (32%) from participants. Administrators and teachers recommended teachers need to meet with their colleagues, those inside and outside of their grade level, to discuss student needs and successes, in addition to

sharing data about student progress. They shared that giving teachers time to establish these connections is imperative. The teachers participating in this study were appreciative of their building administrators recognizing this need.

Administrators mentioned investing time and resources into the teachers who were leading initiatives and embracing effective practices. Elementary Principal A suggested identifying teachers who wanted to improve and ensuring those teachers have an opportunity to share their effective practices and lessons. “The other teachers are going to follow when they see great things happening. Find those teachers that never stop learning and are doing great things in their classrooms.” The community education director shared a similar recommendation noting that those teachers who are effective and achieving excellence deserve attention and will likely cause less effective teachers to improve.

Connection with Families. Six statements (6%) from participants of this study recommended connecting with students’ families to ensure an effective and successfully aligned P-3 system. Guiding families toward engaging in Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) classes (including Parent Education), was encouraged by all participants in this study. The parent/guardian focus group participants recalled meeting many of their closest friends in ECFE. Those relationships have continued as these parents have engaged in the Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTOs) in their children’s elementary schools.

Additionally, administrators considered ECFE to be a venue that allowed parents to determine they are not parenting in isolation, but rather recognized many parents may be struggling with similar issues. Having similar supports for parents in kindergarten, first, second, and third grades was also recommended by administrators who understood incorporating this structure would increase family engagement. Parents agreed and believed an ECFE-like structure

in the elementary grades would be well-received and highly attended. The parent/guardian focus group also recommended valuing the parent volunteers and those who engage in ECFE to encourage future participation in schools.

Effective Communication Systems. The final recommendation from study participants was implementing an effective communication system among all stakeholders in P-3 aligned school systems. Five statements (5%) recommended communication as a factor in having a thriving P-3 aligned school system. Nearly all participants indicated the potential of over-communicating was not an issue. With the integration of Seesaw, teachers were frequently communicating with families regarding individual student progress and class-wide issues. Six out of seven administrators also recommended clear and frequent communication to future implementers as a way to eliminate ambiguity and build relationships with the families of students.

Summary

In this chapter, interview and focus group data from participants representing administrators, teachers, and parents of a Minnesota public school system were presented. The four research questions guiding this study were used to organize and structure the presentation of the data. Each question was described and the corresponding data were presented in tables.

In Chapter V, an analysis of the results is presented along with generalizations from the study. Additionally, recommendations for the field and future research are presented. Data and corresponding research will be used to substantiate the findings and recommendations.

Chapter V: Summary, Conclusions, Discussion, Limitations, and Recommendations

Summary

Chapter V provides a summary of the study and the conclusions drawn from the results presented in chapter four. The researcher will discuss the findings and connect the data related to the research questions with evidence from literature and professional experiences. Recommendations for the field and further research will be presented at the end of the chapter.

The review of related literature indicated the need for continued research on the effects of a continuous system of aligned practices serving students in the years spanning birth to age 8. The literature suggested preschool and early elementary classrooms, educators, administrators, and school systems often do not engage in collaborative practices that lead to smooth transitions for students entering kindergarten through third grade. Research-based approaches to planning, implementing, and evaluating preschool to grade three approaches have been discovered and shared with early education systems across the United States in an effort to better serve students and families.

For the purpose of this study, Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches" was utilized as a conceptual framework. The eight broad components of this framework include: 1) cross sector work; 2) administrator effectiveness; 3) teacher effectiveness; 4) instructional tools; 5) learning environment; 6) data-driven improvement; 7) family engagement; and 8) continuity and pathways. Although the district participating in this study did not use a framework to guide their PreK-3rd grade alignment work, participants revealed all eight components of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework were addressed. Three of the eight components were determined to be significant in

the implementation process: cross-sector work, administrator effectiveness, and instructional tools.

Although the framework exists, a gap in research remains regarding successes of the programs now implementing the strategies Kauerz and Coffman (2019) suggest.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) key components in a Minnesota PreK-3rd grade aligned public school system. Attainment of an aligned educational structure in grades PreK through third grade is achievable when systems utilize the research and implement the research-based approaches with fidelity. The goal of this research was to examine: 1) which of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight components for P-3 approaches a school system chose to implement; 2) the factors stakeholders reported promoted or inhibited the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight components; 3) the student benefits stakeholders noticed since implementing components of the P-3 approach; and, 4) the recommendations stakeholders offered future implementors of the P-3 approach practices.

Research Design

A qualitative method of research design was utilized to evaluate and examine the level to which the key approaches of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) research are being understood and supported in PreK through third grade classrooms in a Minnesota public school district. Qualitative research most closely aligns with process-oriented frameworks and evaluations (Roberts, 2010) and was utilized during principal interviews, an early childhood coordinator interview, a community education director interview, former and current superintendent interviews, and teacher and parent/guardian focus groups. A review of organizational documents,

including mission and vision statements and referendum information was completed throughout the interviews and focus group discussions. This review provided clarity on the district's request for referendum funding and how the funding would be used to expand early childhood spaces, along with other buildings in the school district, and expand the early learning programming for the district's youngest learners. Regarding qualitative research methods, The Administration of Children and Families (2016) state, "Data often are collected in the settings under study, and they aim for rich description of complex ideas or processes, albeit typically across a limited number of individuals or settings" (p. 4).

Description of the Study Participants

This study examined the perspectives of three elementary principals, an early childhood coordinator, a community education director, the previous and current superintendent, ten teachers representing grade levels PreK-3rd, and five parents/guardians of students in grades PreK-1 in a Minnesota school district. The seven administrators were interviewed individually on Zoom®, a virtual meeting platform, while the 10 teachers and five parents participated in respective focus group discussions on Zoom®. The interview protocol was created by the researcher based on the contents of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches."

The school district selected for this study was located in a greater Minnesota community. The district served students in five schools: an early learning building for PreK and Kindergarten students, two elementary schools for grades 1-5, a middle school for grades 6-8, and a high school for grades 9-12. This community's population included nearly 14,000 residents. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), the racial demographics of this community, in

2019, was comprised of 90.6% White residents and 7.7% Hispanic or Latino residents. Black or African American residents made up 1.2% of this community's population.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study examined which of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight components for P-3 approaches a school system chose to implement; the factors stakeholders reported promoted or inhibited the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight components; the student benefits stakeholders noticed since implementing components of the P-3 approach; and the recommendations stakeholders offered future implementers of the P-3 approach practices.

1. Of the eight components of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches," what factors led the district/schools to choose the components they are implementing?
2. What factors do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians report either promote or inhibit the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight practices?
3. What benefits do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians report they have observed in students since implementing practices of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) P-3 approach?
4. What recommendations do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians provide for schools interested in implementing Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework in their P-3 programs?

Conclusions

Using qualitative interviews and focus group discussions, the researcher examined the administrators', teachers', and parent/guardians' responses for evidence or lack of evidence related to the components suggested for effective P-3 alignment in Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches." With the data collected from this study, it was determined that every component of the framework was implemented. Three of the eight components were revealed to be the most significant: cross-sector work, administrator effectiveness, and instructional tools. The significance of these components will be explained in detail within each of the following four research questions.

Research Question 1

Of the eight components of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches", what factors led the district/schools to choose the components they are implementing?

According to the study results, five themes emerged as factors leading the school district to implement P-3 components into their system: budget, buy-in of core mission, curriculum, data-driven decisions, and leadership. Key factors were found to directly correlate with four components of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework: cross-sector work, instructional tools, learning environment, and administrator effectiveness.

Cross-sector Work. The goal of cross-sector work is to have "mechanisms, resources, and structures exist that reflect, support, and sustain shared vision, collaborative relationships, and mutual accountabilities between ECE/0-5 and K-12" (Kauerz & Coffman, 2019, p. 9). This component was determined to be implemented in the school system examined in this study with the data collected validating this district's collaboration with many stakeholders and the

development of program offerings that support both students and families. During the interviews, participants shared the district's core mission of "Every Kid, Every Day," which directly supported the strategic planning component of cross-sector work. The participants mentioned the importance of needing to provide equitable opportunities for all students and families by creating structures that provided multiple resources for students and families to be successful, especially at the early childhood level, where the school system and its staff have the greatest ability to provide early intervention strategies. Reynolds (2017) work supported this finding when he stated, "By increasing the dosage, coordination, and comprehensiveness of services, the program is expected to enhance the transition to school and promote more enduring effects on well-being in multiple domains" (p. 1453). Collaboration among school personnel, community members, and parents assisted in providing supportive and well-informed learning environments for students. This district's belief that early childhood education is the foundation or "gateway" into their K-12 system is supported through their use of early interventions and the expansion of their early learning building to grant access to all incoming preschoolers within the district. This practice aligns with the Minnesota Department of Education's (2020b) recommendations for supporting the early education vision by expanding access to high-quality education and services for all young children.

In addition to the district's core mission, the participants' statements revealed funding to be a critical component of cross-sector work. Six of the seven administrators reported that in order to fulfill the district's need for space and obtain the funding to create the district's newly remodeled structure, referendum funds were utilized to support the building of a well-envisioned early learning center. By focusing on expanding early childhood spaces, this district now has the capacity to serve nearly every young child and family in the district prior to entering

kindergarten. While Kauerz and Coffman (2019) encourage increasing the number of full-day PreK slots for children, the overall increase in the number of available preschool options to serve all incoming students supported the continuity and pathways component of the framework. The funding mechanisms for PreK varied greatly from those for kindergarten through third grade as documented by Minnesota's Department of Education (2020b). Minnesota state and local aide partially funded a variety of the state's PreK programs, but the additional costs to sustain and fully implement programming comes from grants and PreK tuition generated by the programs' participants (Minnesota Department of Education, 2020b). The administrative participants' agreed that by accessing referendum dollars to support the early learning structure in this system, the district has recognized the importance and necessity of meeting the needs of its youngest learners. All administrators mentioned the need for state-wide funding changes in early childhood education and suggested investing in early childhood programming, yet reallocation of the district's funds has not yet been considered. According to Kauerz and Coffman (2019), school systems should be investing in teachers and senior-level staffing positions that lead the efforts of P-3 approaches by reallocating, generating, and blending funds to ensure effective implementation. While the administrators interviewed said this district is continuously seeking grants and other funding opportunities, they still had limited funds available to fully support early childhood programming in addition to K-12 programming. With the data collected from the study, the district plans to continue to assess the needs of its early learning programs and create mechanisms to best support the district's youngest learners until the state of Minnesota adequately funds these systems.

Instructional Tools. Kauerz and Coffman (2019) shared that when instructional tools are a part of an aligned P-3 system, "standards, curricula, and assessments focus on both academic

and social-emotional skills, and are aligned to create instructional coherence, P-3." The administrators interviewed in the study indicated they considered standards and curricula were significant factors in all school systems, however only the community education director mentioned Minnesota's Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs). Minnesota's early learning standards are essential to understanding the developmental expectations and curriculum adopted in early learning environments. "The ECIPs, which are aligned with the K-12 Academic Standards, ensure equitable access to a robust education across programs for all children" (Minnesota Department of Education, 2020b). Every administrator and teacher participating in this study discussed the various curricula the district had adopted and could explain the importance of the tools. However, only the community education director referred the linkage between curriculum, instruction, and standards prompting the researcher to question the district's level of curricular alignment to Minnesota's early learning standards. As suggested in the ECIPs, ensuring all administrators and teachers understand the developmental milestones and skills outlined in the ECIPs are necessary to build an aligned curricular map for PreK-Kindergarten and beyond (Minnesota Department of Education, 2020b). The researcher's familiarity with the instructional tools the district's adopted in this district provided confirmation that the tools were aligned to standards.

Most recently, the district hired a social-emotional instructor to address the increasing social-emotional needs of students. This individual will also serve as the liaison for students transitioning from kindergarten in the early childhood building to the district's elementary buildings for first grade. The district's hiring of this instructor supported the research of Hite and Lord (2015). They reported that an instructional focus in high-quality preschool programs should be in all of the developmental domains of learning, but it is the social-emotional instruction and

experiences that secure the largest academic achievement results in future years. “The real benefits are not from making children smarter, but from nurturing children’s noncognitive skills, giving them social, emotional, and behavioral benefits that lead to success later in life” (Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2008, p. 4). This decision is further supported by Gomez (2016), who recognized quality programming and instruction is one of the most significant factors in the sustainability of cognitive and social-emotional outcomes for students as they transition through the primary grades.

Learning Environment. Kauerz and Coffman (2019) recognized the goal of the learning environment component is to have “the physical space and school/program culture promote collaborative relationships, actively engage all children in a variety of learning experiences and settings, and support the health and wellness of children and adults” (p. 17). With the data gathered from the current superintendent’s interview, the district will be working toward being more culturally inclusive within their learning environments and instruction. Equity training was addressed by the current superintendent after discussing the district’s increase in racial diversity. With the current superintendent being the only participant to address cultural inclusivity, which addresses only one of the elements of the learning environment component, further education for the staff on equity and systemic issues that negatively impact students and the need for equity and trauma-informed practices will be essential. A recent study by the National Conference of State Legislatures (2019) reported the need for states and their school systems to support early learning and close opportunity gaps. The study suggested providing professional development for PreK through third grade teachers to increase their effectiveness in meeting the needs of diverse learners (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019).

Administrator Effectiveness. The goal of administrator effectiveness is to have "administrators (district superintendents, school principals, ECE directors) actively create a culture and organizational structures that ensure the quality of P-3 learning" (Kauerz & Coffman, 2019, p. 11). The administrative team at the early learning building in this study discussed the importance of shared leadership, fostering teamwork, and creating developmentally appropriate learning environments, all vital elements of administrator effectiveness. Jacobson's (2011) research supports the early learning principal's philosophy of creating an environment where "kids can get dirty and sweaty" by stating:

> principals need to appreciate the role of play and other developmentally appropriate practices in building children's vocabulary skills; use assessments that capture the broad range of children's growth—not just math and literacy; and form partnerships with early-learning providers in the community to create greater awareness about the educational experiences children have before they enter school. (p. 12)

While this team was led by the early learning principal, the community education director and early childhood coordinator worked closely with the early learning principal to maintain cohesive transitions among grade levels, a positive school culture, and a school environment that supported young learners' developmental and diverse needs, as reported by the administrators. The person serving as the interim early childhood administrator did not have leadership experience before stepping into this position. The early learning principal's ability to guide the interim coordinator toward developing leadership skills and model the practices of effective administrators revealed the principal's ability to foster relationships and put the needs of students and the school community first, as Jacobson's (2011) research supports.

The researcher concluded this district is seeking to live by its mission of "Every Kid Every Day." The development of spaces for expanded early learning classrooms where students can play as a mode of learning, the hiring of a social-emotional instructor to address these developing needs in young children and to act as a liaison for students as they transition to the grade 1-5 buildings, and the start of discussions about equity issues in education revealed the district's priorities for impacting every child. The researcher considered these to be leading factors for choosing to implement components of a P-3 framework.

Research Question 2

What factors do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians report either promote or inhibit the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight practices?

According to the study results, five themes emerged as factors promoting or inhibiting the implementation of P-3 components into their system: communications and relationships with stakeholders, community partnerships and collaborations, curricular decisions, instructional alignment, leadership decisions. These factors directly correlate with eight components of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework: cross-sector work, administrator effectiveness, continuity and pathways, data-driven improvement, teacher effectiveness, learning environment, instructional tools, and family engagement. Kauerz and Coffman assert that components of their framework often overlap, as was determined to be accurate in this research study in the areas of cross-sector work and administrator effectiveness, continuity and pathways and data-driven improvement, as well as teacher effectiveness, learning environment, and instructional tools.

Cross-sector Work and Administrator Effectiveness. With the rapid growth occurring in the school district, the former superintendent determined a referendum was required to create more learning spaces in this school system. The community voted and passed a two-question

referendum that provided the district with $39,000,000 to expand schools and learning spaces in addition to an increase in per pupil funding. In addition to creating additional learning spaces, the former superintendent determined focusing on the development of early learning programming was a significant factor for this district to consider. This leader understood the importance of early childhood education and the numerous benefits the district would acquire with an investment in early learning.

The former superintendent created buy-in with the school board, staff, and community to successfully pass the district's referendum. With the passing of the referendum, the district was able to elicit the funds necessary to build the "gateway" model which allowed every young child living in this community to have access to early learning programming prior to entering kindergarten. This, in turn, promoted the implementation of these components. The former superintendent believed the district's leadership assisted in gaining the community's overwhelming support of the referendum. This superintendent considered the community to be a strong advocate and supporter of early childhood education; and he believed the community played an essential role in the district's ability to create early learning spaces that supported young students and families prior to kindergarten entrance.

According to Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) research, cross-sector work and administrator effectiveness require school systems to prioritize early learning by executing leadership decisions that support providing early learning spaces for all children in PreK and developing systems that support the on-going growth and development of early childhood programming. The former superintendent stressed to the staff and community that this new model would not be another initiative they would conduct one year and then move away from in subsequent years. This thoughtful restructuring exemplified the district's philosophy and supportive culture while

providing a commitment to continuing to improve education for their students every day. This district recognized that continuous improvement work is never done in education. They were committed to the journey. With the passing of the referendum in 2015, it was clear that this district's community members believed in the education of young children and valued the early learning model the leadership developed for the district's youngest students.

In addition to securing the funds to create this early learning model, the former superintendent selected a principal (now the current superintendent), who was co-leading an elementary school at the time of the transition, to lead the newly developed early learning building. The current superintendent's elementary principal duties were relieved mid-year, to allow for time to develop a building philosophy and culture and hire and train staff which was a significant factor promoting the implementation of these components. This leadership model is not a common practice in education but proved to be extremely effective for this district as the structure has remained while the building and programming have transitioned to new leadership. The foundation and philosophy remained focused on early learning and intervention and continued to support developmentally appropriate practices.

Some of the most critical work and cost-effective investments schools can make is that of improving early education programs for children ages birth through grade three (MinnCAN, 2014). Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) goals in the cross-sector work and administrator effectiveness components also suggest districts and administrators should reallocate funds to support early childhood education. While the referendum created more early learning spaces, funding to support the expansion of early learning programming remained a challenge and an inhibiting factor of component implementation. The school district in this study has benefitted from a few grants and the state-allocated early education funds, but reallocation of district funds

has not occurred to support the staff salaries and programming costs, as Kauerz and Coffman (2019) suggest. Districts are often limited in the amount of financial resources they can use to assist their early childhood programs. The former and current superintendents indicated stakeholders need to advocate for the state of Minnesota to adjust their funding mechanisms to better support district early childhood systems. In the meantime, they agreed that districts need to prioritize funding for early learning to the best of their abilities. In their research, Thrive in 5's (2009) study confirmed this finding as they suggested children are born ready to learn, and yet high-quality early learning programs that support this readiness are the least funded and accessible in our educational systems (2009).

Additionally, as reported by the community education director, early childhood coordinator, early learning principal and the PreK teachers, providing home visits to families of early childhood students is a service provided by the school district with the use of local levy funds. The community education director reported this district received very few funds to conduct home visits and often needed to rely on grants or use Early Childhood Family Education funds to supplement the costs of these visits. The early childhood teachers participating in this study mentioned the on-going need for home-visits for the families of early childhood students.

Continuity and Pathways and Data-driven Improvement. Similar to Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) research, continuity and pathways and data-driven improvement were also shown to overlap in this study. The majority of the administrators and teachers in this study revealed they are beginning to share data with students' next grade level teachers and recognize the importance of this practice. However, the early learning principal and two teachers in this study remained cautious about data sharing and would rather take time to get to know students without a lot of data as to provide a "clean slate." Jacobson's (2011) research discovered

intentional encounters among teachers to share student data allowed every educator to have a clear understanding of the skills students should possess prior to entering the next grade level, causing students' transitions to be smooth and gradual. While the majority of participants' statements supported the sharing of student data, ensuring all administrators and teachers are practicing this model is essential for effective implementation.

During the interviews, all administrators, teachers, and several parents pointed out the differences in each school's "rules." The school's usage of varying language and models for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) frameworks were determined to be an inhibiting factor of component implementation. These models are often considered essential to the development of school expectations and cultures. The Minnesota Department of Education (2018), determined the primary function of district leadership and educators is to ensure that a common language and understanding exists around the expected outcomes of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports implementation. As children transition from the early learning building to the elementary schools, research and interview data supported this district's need for having a common language and understanding of the expectations.

Teacher Effectiveness, Learning Environment, and Instructional Tools. Kauerz and Coffman (2019) acknowledge the goal of teacher effectiveness is "teachers are actively dedicated to providing high-quality instruction and effective learning experiences for all children, P-3" (p. 13). This study revealed teachers believed their Learning Walks promoted the implementation of teacher effectiveness, learning environment, and instructional tools as they increased their skills and repertoire of instructional strategies, the developmental appropriateness of their learning environments, and their exposure to the variety of curricula utilized throughout the district. The

Learning Walks were opportunities for teachers to view their colleagues' instructional practices in action and gain insight on strategies they would like to implement in their instruction.

Time remains a prohibiting factor of the teacher effectiveness approach. All teacher participants agreed their administrators provided time for planning, professional development and meetings. The time, however, to effectively share student data and discuss instructional strategies was often taken up by logistical agenda items. This finding was aligned with HighScope's philosophy of offering time for preschool and kindergarten teachers to gather and develop smooth transition protocols for their students (Albro, 2016).

While the curricula adopted by the district promoted the implementation of instructional tools, teachers reported the variety of the curricula was an inhibiting factors of component implementation. The teachers recognized the differences in PreK curricula from that of kindergarten through third grade, yet teachers were not aware of the content, structure, or standards addressed in any grade level other than their own. The PreK curricula is more play-based and investigative, while K-3's curricula contain the more traditional components of K-12 curriculum: textbooks, workbooks, and manuals.

Family Engagement. Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) research determined the family engagement component's goal is "families are actively and systemically involved with P-3 teachers and administrators as full partners in helping their children develop, learn, and achieve" (p. 21). Administrators, teachers, and parents agreed communication is a significant factor in promoting the implementation of the family engagement approach supported by MinnCAN's (2014) research.

> PreK-3rd grade alignment leads to stronger family engagement. When educators communicate more candidly with each other and with families, and when they have

> meaningful data to guide their instruction and conversations, families are more likely to get (and stay) involved (MinnCAN, 2014, p. 8).

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) is a factor promoting the family engagement component implementation. All of the parent/guardian participants had engagement in early childhood education opportunities with their children. These participants were actively involved in the school district's Parent Advisory Councils and Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTOs) when their children were in PreK and have remained involved in these volunteer organizations as their children have grown. Research indicated that family engagement plays an essential role "…in students' success, particularly beginning in the younger years…" and "is a fundamental ingredient for children's success in school" (Early Education Department of the San Francisco Unified School District, 2012, p. 43).

The data gathered from this research question concluded all eight components of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework are being implemented in this education system. While curricular decisions were the leading factors in promoting and inhibiting component implementation, leadership decisions followed closely behind. A successful referendum was one of the leading factors promoting additional early learning spaces in this district. Without the passing of the referendum, additional early learning spaces and the district's restructuring would not have been able to occur. The former superintendent's decision to give the incoming early learning principal the time to develop the model for the future early learning center is not an option regularly chosen by lead administrators. This decision allowed for the development of a strong philosophical foundation to build a "gateway" into this school district. Based on the research from this study, this is a strategy that should be utilized by more educational leadership. The leading factor of leadership decisions inhibiting component implementation appeared to be a

lack of funding allocated to develop and sustain programming for early education. The literature supporting the reallocation of funds is apparent as it pertains to early intervention and future academic success of students; therefore, administrators need to discover ways to reevaluate funding mechanisms (Kauerz and Coffman, 2019).

Research Question 3

What benefits do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians report they have observed in students since implementing practices of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) P-3 approach?

According to the study results, two themes emerged as benefits students gain from the implementation of P-3 components in the school district: educational benefits and family benefits. These benefits directly correlate with three components of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework: instructional tools, learning environment, and family engagement. The educational benefits identified overlapped in the instructional tools and learning environment components.

Instructional Tools and Learning Environment. While observation of instruction was not a method of data collection utilized in this study, all participants agreed integrating multiple research-based and effective instructional strategies increased the likelihood students receive the instruction needed for growth and success. Teachers and administrators commented on the need for developmentally appropriate instructional practices and reported they believed students benefit from this philosophy of instruction and development, especially in the early learning years. This finding aligns with HighScope's belief that coexistence between academic demands and developmentally appropriate practices can occur in early learning environments (Albro, 2016).

Through the focus group discussion with teachers, the researcher learned the curricula and instructional practices were focused on developmental learning in PreK-3rd grade. The study's data led the researcher to determine the knowledge of effective practices is transferred into the instruction provided to students in the schools' learning environments in this study.

Kauerz and Coffman (2019) report creating and maintaining learning environments that promote self-regulation and foster the development of relationships will lead to well-managed and inviting classrooms. The study revealed the social-emotional needs of young students are being addressed in this district with the integration of the social-emotional instructor and aligning of instructional tools and practices. This finding was determined to be an educational benefit for students by the administrators, teachers, and parents who highlighted the importance of social-emotional development and stated they believed the district was focused on developing these skills.

Family Engagement. Providing home visits to families of early childhood students was a service provided by the school district involved in this study and was recognized as a benefit to both students and their families. The PreK teachers and the community education director reported these visits provided opportunities for families to connect with the school district in a non-traditional format and have their needs supported by licensed parent educators in addition to increasing the likelihood they would volunteer in future school events. These findings correlated with Campbell et al.'s (2002) Carolina Abecedarian Project research which determined families who received home-visits were more inclined to participate in school-based programming.

The findings concluded the practices of social-emotional and developmental learning were embedded into the instruction provided by the teachers in this school district which greatly benefitted the students they served. With these practices in place, students were encouraged to

make mistakes and learn from those errors while finding ways to self-regulate and develop relationships in the classroom. Family engagement was encouraged by both administrators and teachers. Home visits and ECFE attendance appeared to have a great impact on students. These family activities also increased the likelihood that future family engagement in students' educational experiences would occur. Home visits were an avenue for building meaningful and trusting relationships with families. It was reported that families who previously had negative school experiences overcame these for their children's benefit after receiving a positive home visiting experience.

Research Question 4

What recommendations do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians provide for schools interested in implementing Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework in their P-3 programs?

According to the study results, four themes emerged as recommendations for future implementers of P-3 components: effective leadership, data-driven and effective teachers, connections with families, and effective communication systems. These recommendations directly aligned with four components of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework: administrator effectiveness, teacher effectiveness, family engagement, and continuity and pathways.

Administrator Effectiveness. Administrators in this study recommended gradually implementing components of P-3 approaches to be effective. The administrators and researcher agreed that through experience, immediate implementation has a tendency to not be fully effective or well structured. Assessing the system's capacity for change and the resources available are critical factors to consider prior to implementation. The notion of "go slow to go

fast" is cycling through education communities as a method leading to successful and thoughtful implementation of initiatives.

Additionally, the administrators who participated in this study reported they valued social-emotional literacy and believed it had a significant impact on student achievement. Their eagerness to integrate a social-emotional instructor as a liaison for students transitioning into first grade suggested they understood the importance of students' social-emotional health and well-being.

Findings of this study also suggested having administrators with strong early childhood backgrounds would benefit the system, staff, students, and families as mentioned by the administrator participants. These findings were confirmed with Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) research that suggested investing in a senior-level staff position to manage all P-3 efforts. In addition to literature, the researcher's leadership experience suggested a leader with early education knowledge would more easily assess the needs while developing and guiding the programming required for early education students and families.

Teacher Effectiveness. Allocating time specifically for teachers to share student data was recommended by the teacher participants of this study. It is advantageous for teachers to observe, plan, instruct, and assess with student data available. While some teachers and administrators may wish to honor the "clean slate" model, the value of student data and the overwhelmingly supportive statements from the majority of participants outweighed any prohibiting factors. This belief was supported by research revealing effective programs and educators use the data collected from observations and assessments to inform instruction and improve instructional methods (Atchinson & Diffey, 2018; Daily, 2014; MinnCAN, 2014).

Family Engagement. All participants recommended families and students should attend ECFE. Every administrator participant in this study agreed ECFE was an essential component of the P-3 approach as it layed a foundation for family involvement in student learning and the school system. These administrators reported parents were connected with a variety of resources in ECFE settings that supported their parenting journey and the development of their young children. These findings are supported by Hayakawa, et al., who said, "…School-family-community partnerships have the potential to increase students' chances of success by removing stressors and barriers, particularly for at-risk children, through providing a positive environment that is collaborative in nature" (2015, p. 2).

Continuity and Pathways. Many administrators noted the demand for early education funding. Grants are non-sustainable and do not guarantee consistent programming annually. Investing in early childhood will give learners an early advantage and provide the community with well-educated and involved families. Many research studies have been completed documenting the "return on investment" preschool programs yield. "The potential payoff on this investment is large: high-quality model preschool programs have been found to return $4 to $10 in future benefits per dollar spent — in preventing later risky behavior and in boosting academic and labor market success" (Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 2013, p. 1). These findings were consistent with Hite and Lord's (2015) research. "While high rates of special education placement drive up public education costs, high-quality, state-funded pre-K programs can help prevent some of these placements before school entry if children are properly screened for developmental delays early and supported by highly qualified teachers through specialized services" (Hite & Lord, 2015, p. 6).

In conclusion, the recommendations from participants relied heavily on the leadership of administrators. Administrators are encouraged to have strong early childhood backgrounds and believe in the importance of embedding social-emotional learning and support throughout their school systems. Administrators need to establish time for their teachers to share data with current and future teachers while also providing time for collaboration, planning, and professional development. Additionally, administrators are encouraged to eliminate barriers for families by providing services within the school systems and reallocating funds whenever possible to support early learning programming leading to greater academic achievement.

This district remains committed to addressing the needs of young students and their families. As the former superintendent stated, “This is not an initiative. This is a philosophy and a culture.” All stakeholders reported they believed in the on-going journey and effort it takes to develop an aligned system that best serves its students. These participants remain committed to ensuring the success of this process.

Limitations

Limitations within research are often out of the control of the researcher conducting the study. “Limitations are particular features of your study that you know may negatively affect results or your ability to generalize” (Roberts, 2010, p. 162). The identified limitations for this study are as follows:

- Due to varied availability, only five of the ten requested parents/guardians were able to attend our scheduled focus group. Having additional parents/guardians of children in the same grade levels would have provided more depth and understanding from parent/guardian perspectives.

- Documents containing extensive referendum information could not be located by the administrators participating in this study.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the research collected during this study, along with the information gathered from the review of the literature, the researcher recommends that school systems consider the following:

- Superintendents and district-level administrators should make early learning a priority in districts by advocating for increased access to serve every student prior to kindergarten and reallocating, blending, and/or braiding funds whenever possible.
- Minnesota should consider adjusting the funding allocated to public school early learning programs in an effort to expand programming and educate children and families prior to kindergarten entrance.
- To attract high-quality early childhood educators to the profession, districts should work with local unions to alter contractual language to offer early childhood educators similar salaries and benefits as their K-12 teacher colleagues.
- Colleges and universities should consider an Early Childhood Director certification. After obtaining this certification, districts may be more likely to consider hiring Early Childhood Director positions and welcoming these professionals on their leadership teams.
- For deeper and more effective implementation, districts should implement all of the Kauerz and Coffman (2019) framework components and recommendations.

Recommendations for Further Research

The following are recommendations for further research in field of P-3 alignment approaches:

- Conduct a quantitative survey of Minnesota districts implementing elements of P-3 approaches to determine the extent to which components are being implemented across the state.
- Narrow the study by examining only the Continuity and Pathways component of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework to focus on the transition between PreK and Kindergarten, Kindergarten and First, First and Second, and Second and Third grades.
- Examine the achievement rates of students who have been through a P-3 aligned school system to determine the long-term effectiveness of P-3 components.
- Conduct research examining the models of administrative leadership in early childhood programs and the effects of this leadership across Minnesota.
- Replicate this study in a diverse, urban school location in Minnesota to compare the implementation practices and gauge the effectiveness of components in diverse settings.

Concluding Remarks

Building school systems grounded in the developmentally appropriate practice philosophies of early education creates learning environments supportive of young children's social-emotional health and development. The costs of special education increase as students advance through their school years. By investing in early education administrators, teachers, and programming, districts are establishing foundations within school systems to meet the needs of students and families prior to kindergarten and providing early intervention strategies that lessen

the costs of special education later in children's academic careers. Families who are engaged in school systems and feel valued by teachers and administrators are more inclined to stay connected throughout their children's school experience. Developing and maintaining P-3 aligned school systems reveals districts' beliefs in the importance of reaching every child during their critical developmental years and building partnerships with families that will encourage and support student achievement.

References

Administration of Children and Families. (2016). *Qualitative research methods in program evaluation: Considerations for federal staff.* Washington, DC: Author.

Albro, C. (2016, Winter). HighScope's teaching practices: The road to kindergarten. *HighScope Resource for Educators*, pp. 13-17.

Atchinson, B., & Diffey, L. (2018). *Initiatives from preschool to third grade: A policymaker's guide.* Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

Atkins-Burnett, S. (2007). *Measuring children's progress from preschool through third grade.* Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Balbach, E. D. (1999). *Using case studies to do program evaluation.* Sacramento, CA: California Department of Health Services.

Bassok, D., Gibbs, C. R., & Latham, S. (2015). *Do the benefits of early childhood interventions systematically fade? Exploring variation in the association between preschool participation and early school outcomes*. University of Virginia. Charlottesville, VA: EdPolicyWorks.

Campbell, F., Conti, G., Heckman, J., Hyeok Moon, S., Pinto, R., Pungello, L., & Pan, Y. (2014). Abecedarian & health: Improve adult health outcomes with quality early childhood programs that include health and nutrition. *Science, 343,* 1478-1485.

Campbell, F., Ramey, C., Pungello, E., Sparling, J., & Miller-Johnson, S. (2002). Early childhood education: Young adult outcomes fromt the abecedarian project. *Applied Developmental Science, 6*(1), 42-57.

Cannon, J. S., & Karoly, L. A. (2007). *Who is ahead and who is behind? Gaps in school readiness and student achievement in the early grades for California's children.* Santa

Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from rand.org: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9306/index1.html

Castillo-Montoya, M. (2016). Preparing for interview research: The interview protocol refinement framework. *The Qualitative Report*.

Castro, D. C. (2014). *Research based on best practices for DLLs in prek-3rd grade: Instructional strategies and language of instruction approaches.* Denton, TX: National Research Summit on the EARly Care and Education of Dual Language Learners.

Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. (2008). *Preschool programs: A synthesis of current policy issues.* Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Department of Psychology.

Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes and the Council of Chief State School Officers. (2017, July 2019). *Birth to grade 3 indicator framework: Opportunities to integrate early childhood in ESSA.* Washington, DC: Author. www.ccsso.org

Che, J., Malgieri, P., Ramos, V., Page, H., & Holt, A. (n.d.). *Strategic data project fellowship capstone report: Early elementary on-track indicators leading to third-grade reading proficiency.* Cambridge, MA: Center for Education Policy Research.

Clements, D. H., Sarama, J., Wolfe, C. B., & Spitler, M. E. (2013). Longitudinal evaluation of a scale-up model for teaching matematics with trajectories and teachnologies: Persistence of effects in the third year. *American Education Research Journal, 50*(4), 812-850.

Daily, S. (2014). *Initiatives from preschool to third grade: A policymaker's guide.* Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

Duncan, G. J., & Magnuson, K. (2013). Investing in preschool programs. *Journal of Economic Perspectives, 27*(2), 109-132.

Dusenberry, L., Zadrazil Newman, J., Weissberg, R., Goren, P., Domitrovich, C., & Mart, A. K. (2015). The case for preschool through high school state learning standards for SEL. In J. A. Durlak, *Handbook for social emotional learning.* New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Early Education Department of the San Francisco Unified School District. (2012). *PreK-3rd annual report year one: 2011-2012.* San Franscisco, CA: San Francisco Unified School District.

Ewen, D. (2017, July 25). *Using ESSA to build a birth-to-third grade early education continuum.* Retrieved from http://ceelo.org/essa-blog-13-build-b-3-continuum/

Ewen, D., & Herzfeldt-Kamprath, R. (2016). *Examining quality across the preschool-to-third-grade continuum.* Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

Foster, W., & Miller, M. (2007, July). Development of the literacy achievement gap: A longitudinal study of kindergarten through third grade. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 38,* 173-181.

Frede, E., & Barnett, W. S. (2011, May/June). Why pre-k is critical to closing the achievement gap. *Principal,* pp. 8-11.

Gomez, R. E. (2016). Sustaining the benefits of early education experiences: A research overview. *Voices in Urban Education,* (43).

Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development. (2006, October 24). Retrieved July 2019, from Illinois.gov: https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/OECD/Documents/What%27s%20New/B-3%20FAQ.pdf

Greeley, S., Britton, K., & Sherman, L. (2008, March). *PreK-3rd grade in Minnesota.* Boston, MA: Thrive in 5 Boston. Retrieved July 2019, from Thrive in Five: Boston's School

Readiness Roadmap: http://mnprek-3.wdfiles.com/local--files/national-prek-3-programs/Thrive%20in%205%20-%20Boston.pdf

Grunewald, R. (2013, February 8). *https://www.minneapolisfed.org/topic/early-childhood-development.* Retrieved from minneapolisfed.org: https://www.minneapolisfed.org/~/media/files/publications/studies/earlychild/fade_out_grunewald_020813.pdf?la=en

Hayakawa, M., Englund, M., Candee, A., Lease, E., Sullivan, M., Warner-Richter, M., & Reynolds, A. J. (2015). Effective partnerships in school reform: Lessons learned from the midewest child-parent center expansion. *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk, 20*(4), 263-280.

Hite, J., & Lord, J. (2015). *Confronting the fade-out debate: Children flourish and gains do last in high-quality pre-k programs.* Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Educatio Board's Early Childhood Commission.

Jacobson, D. (2016). *Building state P-3 systems: Learning from leading states.* New Brunswick, NJ: Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes.

Jacobson, L. (2011). *Right from the start: Transition strategies for developing a strong preK-3 continuum.* Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers.

Jenkins, J. M., Watts, T. W., Magnuson, K., Clements, D., Sarama, J., Wolfe, C. B., & Spitler, M. E. (2015, February). *Preventing preschool fadeout through instructional intervention in kindergarten and first grade.* Retrieved from http://inid.gse.uci.edu/files/2011/03/Jenkinsetal_Fadeout_SREE.pdf

Kauerz, K., & Coffman, J. (2013). *Framework for planning, implementing, and evaluation preK-3rd grade approaches.* Seattle, WA: College of Education, University of Washington.

Kauerz, K., & Coffman, J. (2019). *Framework for planning, implementing, and evaluating P-3 approaches.* Denver: National P-3 Center.

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). Participants in a focus group. *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, pp. 63-84.

Manpower Domonstration Research Corporation. (2013). *Delivering on the promise of preschool: Investing in social and emotional development and early math skills.* New York, NY: Author

Martella, J., & Connors-Tadros, L. (2014). *Evaluating early childhood educators prekindergarten through third grade: Supplement to the practical guide to designing comprehensive educator evaluation systems.* Washington, DC: Center on Great Teachers & Leaders.

McCormick, M., Mattera, S., & Hsueh, J. (2019). *Preschool to third grade alignment: What do we know and what are we learning?* New York, NY: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

MinnCAN. (2014). *Starting strong: Pre-K through 3rd grade success stories from across Minnesota.* Minneapolis, MN: MinnCAN.

Minnesota Department of Education. (2018). *Working together to implement PBS statewide in education and human services agenda* . Roseville: Minnesota Department of Education.

Minnesota Department of Education. (2020a, February 22). *Early reading proficiency (reading well by third grade)*. Retrieved from Reading Proficiency: https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/prof/

Minnesota Department of Education. (2020b, March 6). *PreK-3rd grade in Minnesota*. Retrieved from Early Childhood Program Administration: http://mnprek-3.wikidot.com/2018-19-regional-workshops

Minnesota Department of Education. (2020c, February 23). *School readiness*. Retrieved from https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/early/read/

Muschkin, C. G. (2018). *Improving educational outcomes in North Carolina: Aligning policy initiatives in pre-K through grade 3.* Duke University. Triangle Park, NC: My Future NC.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2020, March 6). *What is developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)?* Retrieved from NAEYC.org: https://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/dap-introduction

National Conference of State Legislatures. (2019). *Closing early learning opportunity gaps under ESSA.* Washington, D.C.: National Conference of State Legislatures.

National League of Cities. (2012). *Educational alignment for young children: Profiles of local innovation.* Washington, DC: Author.

Psychology Notes HQ. (2019, May 3). *What is Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory*. Retrieved from https://www.psychologynoteshq.com/bronfenbrenner-ecological-theory/

Ramey, C. T., Campbell, F. A., Burchinal, M., Skinner, M. L., & Gardner, D. M. (2000). Persistent effects of early childhood education on high-risk children and their mothers. *Applied Developmental Science, 4*(1), 2-14.

Ready and Successful Schools Work Group. (2013). *Ready and successful schools action plan: Recommendations to the Washington early learning partnership.* University of Washington, Department of Early Learning and Thrive by Five Washington. Seattle, WA: Ready and Successful Schools.

Reynolds, A., Hayakawa, M., Candee, A., & Englund, M. (2016). *CPC P-3 program manual.* University of Minnesota. Minneapolis, MN: Human Capital Research Collaborative.

Reynolds, A. J. (2020, February 29). *About CPC P-3 model*. Retrieved from https://cpcp3.org/about.html

Reynolds, A. J., Hayakawa, M., Ou, S.-R., Mondi, C. F., Englund, M. M., Candee, A. J., & Smerillo, N. E. (2017). Scaling and sustaining effective early childhood programs through school–family–university collaboration. *Child Development*, pp. 1453-1465.

Roberts, C. (2010). *The dissertation journey.* Thousand Oaks: A SAGE Company.

Schilder, D. (2018). *PreK - 3rd grade systems: Lessons learned from New York school districts.* New Brunswick, NJ: Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes.

Schweinhart, L., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W. S., Belfield, C. R., & Nores, M. (2005). *The high/scope Perry preschool study through age 40: Summary, conclusions, and frequently asked questions.* Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation.

Stauffer, B. (2020, April 2). *What's the difference between online learning and distance learning?* Retrieved from Applied Educational Systems: https://www.aeseducation.com/blog/online-learning-vs-distance-learning

Thrive in 5. (2009). *Boston's progress toward universal school readiness.* Boston, MA: Author.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2020, October 28). *Quick facts.* Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts.

U.S. Department of Education. (2015, December 10). *Every student succeeds act.* Retrieved from https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2020, March 6). *Data collection methods for evaluation: Document treview.* Retrieved https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief18.pdf

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2020, February 22). *Early childhood care and education*. Retrieved from https://en.unesco.org/themes/early-childhood-care-and-education

Appendix A: Interview Question Matrix

	Background Information	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	RQ4
What components has your school chosen to implement?		X			
How did your school determine which components to implement?		X			
What data (evidence) did your school have that prompted you to select these components?		X			
How was the PreK-3rd grade alignment work presented to staff?	X				
Who was involved in the PreK-3rd grade alignment work?	X				
Moving forward, which components (if any) might you implement next?	X				
Cross-Sector Work					
What factor(s) prompted you to implement this component?			X		
What factor(s) prevented you from implementing this component?			X		
What steps did you take to implement this component?					
If you could start over with implementation of this component, what might you do differently?					X
If you could start over with implementation of this component, what would you make sure to do the same?					X
How has implementing this component benefitted your students?				X	
What benefits have you noticed in your students since implementing this component?				X	
What factor(s) may prompt you to implement this component in the future?			X		
What factor(s) may prevent you from implementing this component in the future?			X		

What recommendations do you have for others who are implementing this component?					X
Administrator Effectiveness					
What factor(s) prompted you to implement this component?			X		
What factor(s) prevented you from implementing this component?			X		
What steps did you take to implement this component?					
If you could start over with implementation of this component, what might you do differently?					X
If you could start over with implementation of this component, what would you make sure to do the same?					X
How has implementing this component benefitted your students?				X	
What benefits have you noticed in your students since implementing this component?				X	
What factor(s) may prompt you to implement this component in the future?			X		
What factor(s) may prevent you from implementing this component in the future?			X		
What recommendations do you have for others who are implementing this component?					X
Teacher Effectiveness					
What factor(s) prompted you to implement this component?			X		
What factor(s) prevented you from implementing this component?			X		
What steps did you take to implement this component?					
If you could start over with implementation of this component, what might you do differently?					X

If you could start over with implementation of this component, what would you make sure to do the same?					X
What does professional development for staff look like in this school?					
How often do staff meet for professional development?					
How has implementing this component benefitted your students?				X	
What benefits have you noticed in your students since implementing this component?				X	
What factor(s) may prompt you to implement this component in the future?			X		
What factor(s) may prevent you from implementing this component in the future?			X		
What recommendations do you have for others who are implementing this component?					X
Instructional Tools					
What factor(s) prompted you to implement this component?			X		
What factor(s) prevented you from implementing this component?			X		
What steps did you take to implement this component?					
If you could start over with implementation of this component, what might you do differently?					X
If you could start over with implementation of this component, what would you make sure to do the same?					X
What does curriculum alignment look like in your school/district?					
How are teachers involved in curriculum alignment?					
How has implementing this component benefitted your students?				X	

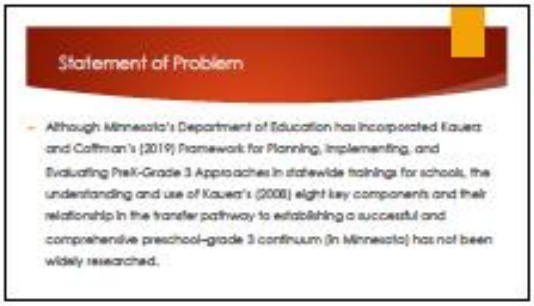
What benefits have you noticed in your students since implementing this component?				X	
What factor(s) may prompt you to implement this component in the future?			X		
What factor(s) may prevent you from implementing this component in the future?			X		
What recommendations do you have for others who are implementing this component?					X
Learning Environment					
What factor(s) prompted you to implement this component?			X		
What factor(s) prevented you from implementing this component?			X		
What steps did you take to implement this component?					
If you could start over with implementation of this component, what might you do differently?					X
If you could start over with implementation of this component, what would you make sure to do the same?					X
How has implementing this component benefitted your students?				X	
What benefits have you noticed in your students since implementing this component?				X	
What factor(s) may prompt you to implement this component in the future?			X		
What factor(s) may prevent you from implementing this component in the future?			X		
What recommendations do you have for others who are implementing this component?					X
Data-Driven Improvement					

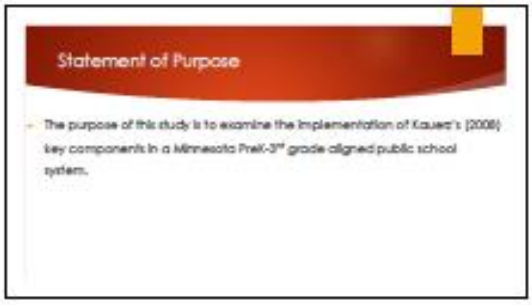
What factor(s) prompted you to implement this component?			X		
What factor(s) prevented you from implementing this component?			X		
What steps did you take to implement this component?					
If you could start over with implementation of this component, what might you do differently?					X
If you could start over with implementation of this component, what would you make sure to do the same?					X
Tell me about student assessments.					
How is assessment information shared with teachers in the next grade level?					
How has implementing this component benefitted your students?				X	
What benefits have you noticed in your students since implementing this component?				X	
What factor(s) may prompt you to implement this component in the future?			X		
What factor(s) may prevent you from implementing this component in the future?			X		
What recommendations do you have for others who are implementing this component?					X
Engaged Families					
What factor(s) prompted you to implement this component?			X		
What factor(s) prevented you from implementing this component?			X		
What steps did you take to implement this component?					
If you could start over with implementation of this component, what might you do differently?					X
If you could start over with implementation of this component,					X

what would you make sure to do the same?					
How is family engagement encouraged in this school?					
What opportunities do parents have to become engaged in their child's school?					
How do you maintain family engagement throughout the school year?					
How do you maintain family engagement year after year?					
How has implementing this component benefitted your students?				X	
What benefits have you noticed in your students since implementing this component?				X	
What factor(s) may prompt you to implement this component in the future?			X		
What factor(s) may prevent you from implementing this component in the future?			X		
What recommendations do you have for others who are implementing this component?					X
Continuity and Pathways					
What factor(s) prompted you to implement this component?			X		
What factor(s) prevented you from implementing this component?			X		
What steps did you take to implement this component?					
If you could start over with implementation of this component, what might you do differently?					X
If you could start over with implementation of this component, what would you make sure to do the same?					X
How do teachers share information about students?					

What types of information are shared with teachers in students' next grade levels?					
Tell me about student transitions to the next grade level.					
What is the process for transitioning students to the next grade level?					
How has implementing this component benefitted your students?				X	
What benefits have you noticed in your students since implementing this component?				X	
What factor(s) may prompt you to implement this component in the future?			X		
What factor(s) may prevent you from implementing this component in the future?			X		
What recommendations do you have for others who are implementing this component?					X

Appendix B: Teacher Focus Group Discussion





Group Goals

- Discuss the implementation of components of effective PreK-3rd grade alignment in Monticello School District #882, how those components benefit the students, and what recommendations you may have for future implementers.
- Maintain an environment where everyone feels safe to share their thoughts and perspectives. Anonymity will be honored in the written dissertation and among participants.

Roles

- **Megan's role: Moderator**
  - Introduces topics
  - Asks questions
  - Keeps us on schedule
- **Teachers' roles: Monticello P-3 Experts**
  - Share expertise
  - Allow and encourage everyone to engage
  - Honor the anonymity of participants outside of this meeting

Cross-Sector Work

- **Governance/Leadership Team**
  - Perceive those responsible to have credibility
  - Demonstrate shared language and understanding
- **Strategic Plans**
  - Demonstrate support of district vision and strategic plan

Questions for you to consider…

- **How does this benefit your students?**
- **Does anything promote or inhibit this work?**
- **What are your recommendations for future implementers?**

Administrator Effectiveness

- **Foster Teamwork**
  - Participate in PLCs with other teachers in grade level (horizontal)
  - Participate in PLCs with teachers in other grade levels (vertical)
- **Instructional Leadership**
  - Perceive feedback from admin as constructive and supportive
  - Demonstrate common instructional practices across all classrooms for all children

Questions for you to consider…

- **How does this benefit your students?**
- **Does anything promote or inhibit this work?**
- **What are your recommendations for future implementers?**


Teacher Effectiveness
Focus on Instruction
Instruct effectively - given the needs of all learners
Support of children's language/reading, math, and social/emotional development
Identify your professional development needs and act on them
Visible Practice
Use "Learning Walks" to observe colleagues
Perceive feedback as constructive and supportive; use it to improve
Work as Teams
Collaborate with colleagues
Know grade level content of other grades


Questions for you to consider...
How does this benefit your students?
Does anything promote or inhibit this work?
What are your recommendations for future implementers?


Instructional Tools
Standards
Know the standards and their requirements
Develop learning progressions
Curricula
Use as a tool to provide instruction
Addresses both academic and social/emotional well-being
Assessments
Use common assessments
Use assessments to reflect on instruction and student needs


Questions for you to consider...
How does this benefit your students?
Does anything promote or inhibit this work?
What are your recommendations for future implementers?


Learning Environment
Culturally Inclusive
Have a variety of materials represented many cultures
Culturally & Linguistically Responsive in teaching methods
Promote Relationships
Have well managed and relationship-driven classrooms that are conducive to learning
Structured to Support Diverse Learners
Support individual, small group, and whole group learning
Have clear routines and organization


Questions for you to consider...
How does this benefit your students?
Does anything promote or inhibit this work?
What are your recommendations for future implementers?


Data-Driven Improvement
Child Data
Analyze data in teams
Use data to determine children's strengths and needs
School-/Program-Based Data
Know how to use data as school
Share data with families


Questions for you to consider…
How does this benefit your students?
Does anything promote or inhibit this work?
What are your recommendations for future implementers?

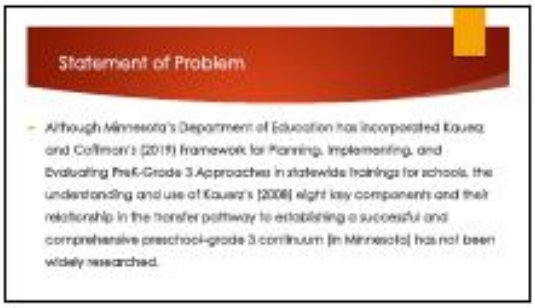

Engaged Families
Core Priority
Regard family engagement as an essential element of your job
Two-Way Communication
Provide conferences, events, home visits, newsletters, etc.
Shared Leadership/Decision Making
Allow parents to help make goals for their student

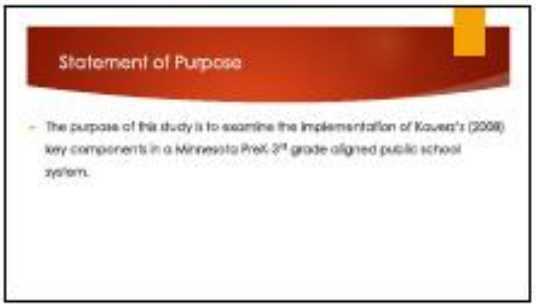

Questions for you to consider…
How does this benefit your students?
Does anything promote or inhibit this work?
What are your recommendations for future implementers?

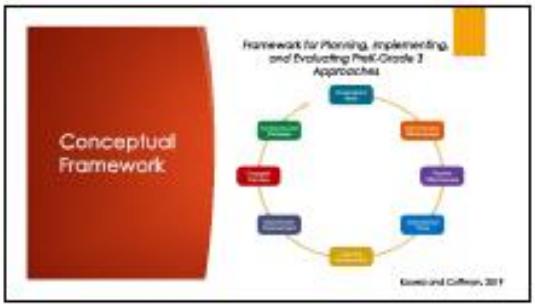

Continuity & Pathways
Access and Continuity of Services
Understand resources available to extend children's learning in both school and community-based programs
P-3 Pathways
Use common transition forms and processes
Review incoming students portfolios/CUMs
Engage in vertical teams (across ages/grade levels) to establish shared priorities, language, instructional practices, and understanding of children's strengths and needs


Questions for you to consider…
How does this benefit your students?
Does anything promote or inhibit this work?
What are your recommendations for future implementers?

Appendix C: Parent/Guardian Focus Group Discussion





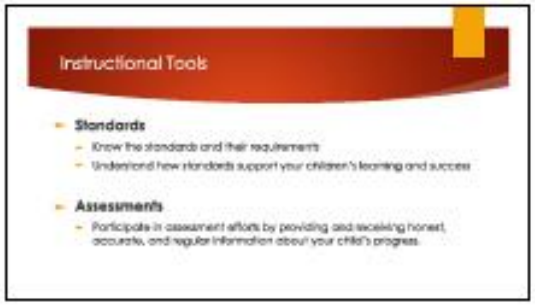



Group Goals
Discuss the implementation of components of effective PreK-3rd grade alignment in Monticello School District #882, how those components benefit the children, and what recommendations you may have for future implementers.
Maintain an environment where everyone feels safe to share their thoughts and perspectives. Anonymity will be honored in the written dissertation and among participants.


Roles
Megan's role: Moderator
Introduces topics
Asks questions
Keeps us on schedule
Parents'/Guardians' roles: Monticello P-3 Family Experts
Share expertise
Allow and encourage everyone to engage
Honor the anonymity of participants outside of this meeting

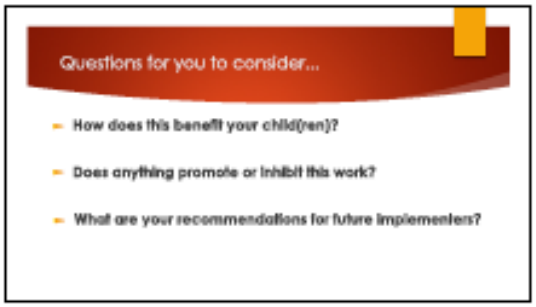

Cross-Sector Work
Governance/Leadership Team
Perceive those responsible to have credibility
Demonstrate shared language and understanding

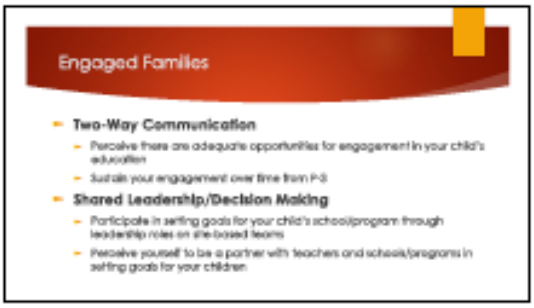

Questions for you to consider...
How does this benefit your child(ren)?
Does anything promote or inhibit this work?
What are your recommendations for future implementers?

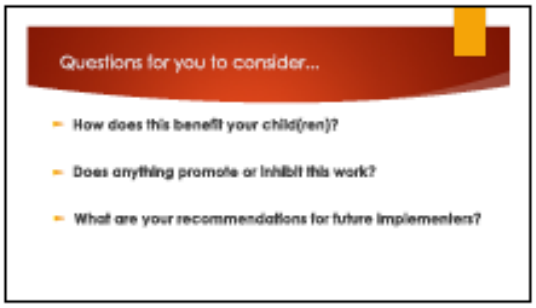

Instructional Tools
Standards
Know the standards and their requirements
Understand how standards support your children's learning and success
Assessments
Participate in assessment efforts by providing and receiving honest, accurate, and regular information about your child's progress.


Questions for you to consider...
How does this benefit your child(ren)?
Does anything promote or inhibit this work?
What are your recommendations for future implementers?

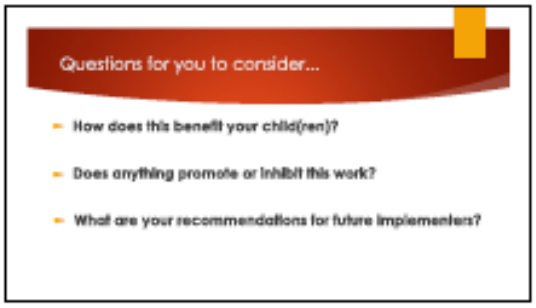

Data-Driven Improvement
Child Data
Have access to data about your child, classrooms, and program/school
Understand the data available and how to use them to support your child's learning
School-/Program-Based Data
Discuss data with your child's teacher
Understand what the data mean for your child, both inside and outside of the classroom.


Questions for you to consider...
How does this benefit your child(ren)?
Does anything promote or inhibit this work?
What are your recommendations for future implementers?


Engaged Families
Two-Way Communication
Perceive there are adequate opportunities for engagement in your child's education
Sustain your engagement over time from P-3
Shared Leadership/Decision Making
Participate in setting goals for your child's school/program through leadership roles on site-based teams
Perceive yourself to be a partner with teachers and schools/programs in setting goals for your children


Questions for you to consider...
How does this benefit your child(ren)?
Does anything promote or inhibit this work?
What are your recommendations for future implementers?


Continuity & Pathways
Access and Continuity of Services
Have accessible information about Early Childhood Education, after-school programs, extended learning opportunities, and community supports
Recognize importance of regular attendance of your children in Early Childhood Education programs and school days
Understand the transition procedures between grade levels including how information is shared


Questions for you to consider...
How does this benefit your child(ren)?
Does anything promote or inhibit this work?
What are your recommendations for future implementers?

Appendix D: IRB Approval

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND SPONSORED PROGRAMS
ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board Protocol For Conduct of Research Involving Human Subjects

PROJECT

Project Title:	**An Examination of the Implementation of PreK-Grade 3 Alignment Approaches in a Minnesota Public School System**
Project Start Date:	**April 20, 2020**
Project End Date:	**June 30, 2020**

RESEARCHER(S)

Principal Investigator

First Name	Last Name	Status (Select One)	Email	Phone Number	IRB Training Completion Date
Megan	Rogholt	☐ faculty/staff ☐ undergraduate ☐ graduate masters ☒ graduate doctoral	mrogholt@stcloudstate.edu	320-493-6745	6-24-19

Co-Investigator/Research Assistant

First Name	Last Name	Status (Select One)	Email	Phone Number	IRB Training Completion Date
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	☐ faculty/staff ☐ undergraduate ☐ graduate masters ☐ graduate doctoral	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	☐ faculty/staff ☐ undergraduate ☐ graduate masters ☐ graduate doctoral	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.

Faculty Mentor/Course Instructor (if Principal Investigator is a student):

First Name	Last Name	Email	Phone Number	IRB Training Completion Date
John	Eller	jfeller@stcloudstate.edu	651-247-2786	Click or tap here to enter text.

ALL Principal Investigator(s) is required to completed SCSU's required CITI IRB training. https://www.citiprogram.org/

If you collaborate with an individual from another institution, we may be able to use an Authorization Agreement with anther institution's IRB. Contact ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu for more information.

SPONSORS

Is there external funding source(s) for this project?

☒No ☐ Pending ☐ If Yes, please provide Funding Agency/Sponsor name and account number.

Funding Agency/Sponsor:	Click or tap here to enter text.
Account #:	Click or tap here to enter text.

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

MR PI Initial here	**As Principal Investigator**, I certify that the information provided in this protocol represents a complete and accurate description of the proposed study, this study will not begin until IRB approval is received, and this study will be conducted in compliance with IRB recommendations and requirements.
MR PI Initial here	**As Principal Investigator**, I understand that modifications, significant new finding which develop during the course of the study or increase the risk of participant, or reporting to the IRB any adverse or unexpected events, and that protocols approved as expedited or full require an annual/final report (protocols approved as exempt do not require continuing review/final report process). To submit a Continuing Review/Final, please complete the **Continuing Review Form**.
JE Faculty Mentor Initial here	**As Faculty Mentor**, I certify that I have reviewed this protocol and that I attest to the scientific merit of this study. I will advise and provide continued guidance to support the study as appropriate for the student's academic development.

Megan Roghwell — **Signature of Principal Investigator** — 04-16-2020 — **Date**

J. F. Ehlen — **Signature of Faculty Mentor/Course Instructor** — *4/21/20* — **Date**

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Purpose of the study (Limited to once sentence):

The purpose of this study is to examine the implementation of Kauerz's (2008) key components in a Minnesota PreK-3rd grade aligned public school system.

2. Project Summary/Abstract (Limited to 250 words):

"During early childhood, the young brain is at its most malleable, so those years constitute a particularly effective time to affect developmental trajectories, and thus long-term life outcomes" (Bassok, Gibbs, & Latham, 2015, p. 1). Interventions that occur during a child's first few years of life are far more effective than those implemented after a child begins elementary school (Hite & Lord, 2015). Some of the most critical work and cost-effective investments Americans can make is that of improving early education programs for children ages birth through eight years. In 2013, Kauerz and Coffman, developed "Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating PreK-3rd Grade Approaches" in an effort to "improve the quality and coherence of children's learning opportunities, from the experiences children have before they enter the K-12 system and extending through elementary school" (p. 1). The framework identified eight key practices to establishing a preschool-grade 3 continuum: cross-sector work, administrative effectiveness, teacher effectiveness, instructional tools, learning environments, data-driven improvements, family engagement, and transfer pathways. Schools are not widely structured to systematically align curriculum and elements of instruction in preschool through third grade (Ewen & Kerzfeldt-Kamprath, 2016), so research to discover the approaches and benefits of a central Minnesota school district's preschool through third grade alignment strategies will be conducted to measure the perceived effectiveness of the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's eight components.

3. Research question(s), if applicable include hypothesis:

1. **Of the eight components of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating P-3 Approaches, what factors led the district/schools to choose the components they are implementing?**
2. **What factors do PreK-grade 3 administrators and teachers report either promote or inhibit the implementation of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) eight practices?**
3. **What benefits have PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents report they have observed in students since implementing practices of Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework?**
4. **What recommendations do PreK-grade 3 administrators, teachers, and parents provide for schools interested in implementing Kauerz and Coffman's (2019) framework in their P-3 programs.**

4. Research design and analysis:

A case study, utilizing a qualitative program evaluation model, will be used to gather information on a PreK -3rd grade implementation approach in a central Minnesota school district. Interviews and focus groups will be conducted, as well as a review of organizational documents including mission, vision, policies and procedures.

5. Recruitment procedures:

a. Who will recruit?

The principal investigator – Megan Rogholt

b. How is the recruitment accomplished?

The principal investigator will request participation from the school district's superintendent via email. The superintendent will request school administrators to participate in interviews. The superintendent and principal investigator will communicate via email to share administrators' contact information. The principal investigator will contact the school district's administrators via email to set up individual times for Zoom interviews. The school administrators will request teachers and parents to participate in focus groups. The prinicipal investigator will obtain contact information for teachers and parents/guardians from the schools' administrators. Focus groups interviews will be set up for 6-10 teachers per group and 6-10 parents per group, and will be conducted on Zoom.

c. How does the participation take place?

☒ Once ☐ Continual Basis ☐ Recurring

d. Will recruitment materials be used?

☐ No ☒ If Yes, please attach all emails, scripts, flyers, etc. used to recruit participants with your protocol.

e. Will cooperation with non-public listservs, directories, memberships, etc. be necessary to recruit participants?

☒ No ☐ If Yes, please list the entities/persons you will be working with. (Each entity/person will also need a support letter indicating they are aware of the study and their involvement in recruitment after IRB approval is given)

Click or tap here to enter text.

f. Will cooperation with professors be necessary to recruit participants?
(Professor(s) allowing you to recruit in their classes)

☒ No ☐ If Yes, please list the professors you will be working with. (Each professor will also need a support letter indicating they are aware of the study and their involvement in recruitment after IRB approval is given)

Click or tap here to enter text.

g. Will cooperation with independent school(s)/institutions(s) be necessary to recruit participants?
(Independent school(s)/institution(s) willing to provide access to students, faculty, staff, or other persons.)

☐ No ☒ If Yes, please list the entities/professors/persons you will be working with. (Each entity/professor/person will also need a support letter indicating they are aware of the study and their involvement in recruitment after IRB approval is given)

Eric Olson – Superintendent of Monticello Schools – ISD #882

h. Will cooperation with medical, clinical, or other professional organization(s) be necessary to recruit participants?
(Medical, clinical, other professional organization(s) willing to provide access to clients/patients)

☒ No ☐ If Yes, please list the entities/professors/persons you will be working with. (Each entity/professor/person will also need a support letter indicating they are aware of the study and their involvement in recruitment after IRB approval is given)

Click or tap here to enter text.

6. Participant activities (List all participant activities from recruitment through study completion *from the participant's perspective*):

Superintendent: the superintendent will receive communication via email from the principal investigator indicating interest in conducting a study in the superintendent's school district. The email will describe the parameters of the study and the participants required. Upon receiving the email, the superintendent will respond via email to express interest in participating in the study. The superintendent will then reach out to his administrative team via email or telephone to engage them and request their participation in the study. The superintendent will contact the principal investigator and provide email addresses and phone numbers of the elementary principals and early childhood

coordinators. Additionally, the superintendent will receive a request via email from the principal investigator to be interviewed about his perspective of the PreK-3rd grade alignment approaches utilized in the district. When the superintendent agrees, an interview will be conducted via Zoom during a time that is convenient for the superintendent as determined by a Doodle Poll. The interview will be recorded for the purpose of coding and to allow the superintendent to adjust or clarify his statements. Organizational documents that describe the structure of Pre-k through 3rd grade implementation and mission and vision statements will be requested by the principal investigator and shared by the superintendent and/or administration via email or the United States Postal Service.

Administrators: After receiving approval from the superintendent, the principal investigator will contact the school district's administrators via email to set up individual times for Zoom interviews. The Zoom interviews will take place during times that are convenient for the administrators as determined by a Doodle Poll. The interviews will be recorded for the purpose of coding and to allow the administrators to adjust or clarify their statements. Additionally, the principal investigator will request the participation of teachers and parents from the administrators. The administrators will contact the teachers (1-2 representatives from grades Pre-k, kindergarten, first, second, and third) in their buildings to seek participation in the study. After the initial request is made by the administrators, the administrators will email the principal investigator to share the email addresses of the teachers who have agreed to participate in focus groups. Additionally, the administrators will contact parents of students who have attended grades pre-k, kindergarten, and first in the district to seek participation in parent focus groups and seek permission to share their email addresses with the principal investigator. The school administrators will share the email addresses of the parents who have agreed to participate with the principal investigator via email.

Teachers and Parents: After receiving approval from the school administrators, the principal investigator will email teachers and parents to request their participation in focus group interviews of 6-10 teachers per focus group interview session and 6-10 parents per focus group interview session. Each focus group interview session will be conducted separately (1-2 sessions of teachers, 1-2 sessions of parents) on Zoom. The Zoom interviews will take place during times that are most convenient for the majority of the participants as determined by a Doodle Poll. The focus group interviews will be recorded for the purpose of coding and to allow the teachers and parents to adjust or clarify their statements.

Former Administration: In addition to the current superintendendent, a request to interview the former superintendent who was present during the implementation of the Pre-k through third grade framework will be requested. The principal investigator will email the former superintendent to request participation in the study. When the former superintendent agrees to participate, a Doodle Poll will be sent to him via email to determine the best time to interview. Once a date is determined, an interview will be conducted via Zoom. The Zoom interview will be recorded for the purpose of coding and to allow the former superintendent to adjust or clarify his statements.

The principal investigator will conduct all Zoom interviews and focus groups.

7. Description of potential participants:

Click or tap here to enter text.

a. Maximum number of anticipated participants:
30

b. Ages:
☐ 0-7 ☐ 8-17 ☒ 18 or older

c. Describe the most relevant characteristics of your participants and explain why these characteristics are necessary for your study:
Early Childhood and Elementary School Administrators who have been in their current positions for two or more years. Teachers who have been teaching in their current grade levels for two or more years. Parents/Guardians who have students who have attended grades Pre-K, Kindergarten, and First grades (those who have experienced these major transitions in schools). Superintendents who were present during the Pre-K through third grade alignment component implementation.

d. Describe any characteristics that would be used to exclude participation from your study:
Administrators and teachers who have not been in their current positions for 2 or more years. Parents/Guardians who do not have children that experienced transitions between Pre-K and Kindergarten, and Kindergarten and first grade. Superintendents who were not present during the implementation of pre-k through third grade alignment components.

e. Will you actively recruit any of the following as participants in your study:

Yes	No	
☐	☒	Prisoners
☐	☒	Economically disadvantaged individuals
☐	☒	Educationally disadvantaged individuals
☐	☒	Individuals with impaired decision-making capacity
☐	☒	Students or other individuals whose risk of identification through dissemination would pose more than minimal risk of harm (reputation, academic standing, immigration status, etc.)
☐	☒	Employees whose risk of identification through dissemination would pose more than minimal risk of harm (reputation, employment status, etc.)
☐	☐	Other, please specify: Click or tap here to enter text.

8. Will participants be compensated for participating in the study?

☒ No ☐ If Yes, you will use:
☐ Money or gift cards, distributed to participants after their time is completed
☐ Money or gift cards, using a lottery system
☐ Extra credit in a course
Will you ensure that other extra credit opportunities are available, as per SCSU requirements ☐ YES ☐ NO
(Note this either in the professor's letter of support or describe here if it is your course)
Click or tap here to enter text.
☐ Other, please describe the compensation.
Click or tap here to enter text.

9. Describe the data/information/biospecimens that will be collected (your dependent variables or equivalent):

The qualitative data collected will be the verbal responses provided by administrators, teachers, parents, and superintendents about their knowledge of, perceptions, and beliefs of the pre-k through third grade alignment implementation in their school district.

10. How will the data be collected (select all that apply):

Use of survey or data collection instruments
☒ No ☐ If Yes, please attach the survey and/or data collection instrument to the IRB submission Interview Guide.
Use of Interview Guide

☐ No ☒ If Yes, please attach the Interview Guide to the IRB submission.

Use of audio/video/photographic means to assist in data collection

☐ No ☒ If Yes, please attach the SCSU audio/video/photographic release to the consent form.

☐ Others, please describe:

Click or tap here to enter text.

11. The data collected are:

☐ ANONYMOUS: no names/identifiers are collected and no signed consent form

☒ If CONFIDENTIAL: identifiers are collected but are not linked to participant response during dissemination.

Are participant identifications linked to response for analysis purpose?

☐ No ☒ If Yes, please explain,

i. The purpose of linking responses

Participant responses will be linked to text in transcripts for the purpose of validating the responses as it related to the research.

ii. The coding process

Each participant will be coded with a letter designated by the principal investigator.

iii. Who will have access to the key? Where will the key be stored?

The principal investigator will be the only person with access to the information.

12. Data Management:

i. How will raw data be stored? (Give the physical location security measures; Example: password-protected computer, locked file cabinet)

Data will be video recorded on Zoom via a password-protected online meeting. After interviews and focus groups have concluded on Zoom, a link will be generated by Zoom that contains video footage of the interviews and focus groups, and sent to the Principal Investigator. This link will be stored on a password-protected computer.

ii. Who is responsible for overseeing the security of the raw data?

Megan Rogholt – Principal Investigator

iii. Who will have access to the raw data when it is outside of storage?

Megan Rogholt – Principal Investigator

iv. Will data be maintained for the purposes of secondary research in the future?

☒ No

☐ If Yes, will the secondary research require additional consent from the participants from whom the data were obtained? ☐ Yes ☐ No

13. How are data presented during dissemination?

Are data presented in aggregate form (groups of participants) with no more than 2 demographic variables presented together?

☒ No ☐ Yes

Are data not presented in aggregate form?

☒ No ☐ If Yes, please explain what data are presented and why this approach will protect participant identity:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Will direct quotes be presented?

☐ No ☒ If Yes:

Will participants be given an opportunity to review their transcripts and 1) make additions, 2) request omissions, and/or 3) have a final opportunity to withdraw their participation?
☐ No ☒ Yes
Will de-identified quotes be used?
☐ No ☒ If yes, explain the de-identification process: Through the transcription process, all quotes will be assigned a letter representative of the letter designated to the participant.

☐ Others, please explain:

Click or tap here to enter text.

14. When will the raw data and/or coding key be destroyed (Check One):

☐ When the study is complete.
☒ When my degree is awarded.
☐ Within 3 years of study's completion.
☐ Other, please explain:
Click or tap here to enter text.

RISK AND BENEFITS

15. What are the anticipated benefits associated with this study for?

a. Participants in the study:
All participants in this study will have participated in ground floor research that will not only serve their future practice and help define the benefits and growth of students and instructional practices in their district, but will also positively impact students, teachers, administrators, and school systems across the country. The participants will receive satisfaction and pride in knowing they have shared their critical voices and lended their expertise to a study that has the capacity to reshape and reform existing programs across Minnesota and the nation. They will be a part of developing a lasting impact on student success and achievement. All participants will receive access to copies of the finalized study.

b. Other individuals, the field of study, society, etc.
Outside of the participants of this study, educational professionals will receive current, research-based information that can positively reshape Pre-K through third grade school structures and systems. They will receive the most up-to-date research on effective practices being implemented in schools and understand the benefits of structuring systems to include components of essential Pre-K through third grade alignment strategies. Ultimately the greatest recipients of the benefits of this study will be students as their school systems adjust to better serve them.

16. What are the potential risks for participants while participating in this study?

There are minimal risks for participants while participating in this study. However, for those participants who are not comfortable with technology, the online interview platform may cause some anxiousness. Also, the demographics and characteristics of the school district described in the study may be recognized by future readers of the research although every effort will be made to honor the anonymity of this school system.

17. Does the study involve:

a. Physical pain, discomfort, or injury from procedures or drugs?
☒ No ☐ If Yes, what precautions will be taken to minimize or prevent potential risks, inconveniences, and discomforts (e.g. anonymous data collection, presence of trained personnel who can respond to emergencies, etc.?
Click or tap here to enter text.

b. Undesired and/or unexpected psychological changes (e.g. depression, anxiety, emotional discomfort, confusion, hallucination, stress, guilt, embarrassment, loss of self-esteem)?
☒ No ☐ If Yes, what precautions will be taken to minimize or prevent potential risks, inconveniences, and discomforts (e.g. anonymous data collection, presence of trained personnel who can respond to emergencies, etc.?
Click or tap here to enter text.

c. Invasion of privacy/absence of informed consent (e.g. covert observation, review of private medical or educational records, etc.)?
☒ No ☐ If Yes, what precautions will be taken to minimize or prevent potential risks, inconveniences, and discomforts (e.g. anonymous data collection, presence of trained personnel who can respond to emergencies, etc.?
Click or tap here to enter text.

d. Sensitive information (e.g. alcohol/drug use, sexual orientation, illegal activities, suicidal thoughts, physical/mental illness, violence, depression, gang related activities, psychological/physical abuse, pro-life/pro-choice, relationship issues, etc.) that could result in social and economic harm (e.g. civil/criminal liability or damage to financial standing, employability, insurability, reputation, etc.) if a breach in confidentiality occurred?

☒ No ☐ If Yes, what precautions will be taken to minimize or prevent potential risks, inconveniences, and discomforts (e.g. anonymous data collection, presence of trained personnel who can respond to emergencies, etc.?
Click or tap here to enter text.

e. Deceptive techniques (e.g. giving false feedback about performance, staging an event or situation, concealing the purpose of the study, etc.)? **A debriefing statement is required; see the handout on deception and the debriefing process.**

☒ No
☐ If Yes:

How will subjects be misled (i.e. what information will be withheld or what false information will be provided)? Describe when and how this deception will be revealed to subjects and provide a copy of the oral or written debriefing statement.
Click or tap here to enter text.

What precautions will be taken to minimize or prevent potential risks, inconveniences, and discomforts (e.g. anonymous data collection, presence of trained personnel who can respond to emergencies, etc.?
Click or tap here to enter text.

18. All projects require consent, which form(s) will be used?

Yes	N/A	
☐	☒	Implied Consent: a cover letter/page accompanying a confidential/anonymous survey to adults
☒	☐	Informed Consent: a signature form for a study with adult subjects
☐	☒	Parental/Guardian Consent: a signature form for a study with subjects under the age of 18
☐	☒	Child Assent: a signature form for a study with subjects who are between the ages of 8 and 18. If study includes subjects under the age of 18, explain the procedures that will be used to obtain parental/guardian and child/minor assent (when applicable): Click or tap here to enter text.

19. IRB Protocol Submission Checklist

a. Required:
- ☒ Signed IRB Protocol
- ☒ Copies of recruitment materials
- ☐ Copies of data collection instrument(s) and/or interview guide(s)
- ☒ Consent form(s)

b. Required if applicable
- ☒ Signed support letter for participant recruitment
- ☒ Debriefing statement or handouts

c. Submit **completed IRB protocol with all attachments** to Research & Sponsored Programs (AS 210) or scan packet to ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu

ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY
EDUCATION FOR LIFE

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Name: Megan Rogholt

Email: mrogholt@stcloudstate.edu

IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION: Exempt Review

Project Title: An Examination of the Implementation of PreK-Grade 3 Alignment Approaches in a Minnesota Public School System

Advisor John Eller

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).

- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.

-Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.

- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.

- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-4932 or email ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

IRB Chair:

Dr. Benjamin Witts
Associate Professor- Applied Behavior Analysis
Department of Community Psychology,Counseling, and Family Therapy

IRB Institutional Official:

Dr. Latha Ramakrishnan
Interim Associate Provost for Research
Dean of Graduate Studies

OFFICE USE ONLY

SCSU IRB# 1988 - 2539	**Type:** Exempt Review	**Today's Date:** 4/28/2020
1st Year Approval Date: 4/28/2020	**2nd Year Approval Date:**	**3rd Year Approval Date:**
1st Year Expiration Date:	**2nd Year Expiration Date:**	**3rd Year Expiration Date:**

ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY
EDUCATION FOR LIFE.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Continuing Review / Final Report

Principal Investigator: **Megan Rogholt**

Co-Investigator:

Project Title: **An Examination of the Implementation of PreK-Grade 3 Alignment Approaches in a Minnesota Public School System**

St. Cloud State University requires all research activities involving human subject – whether or not they are supported by Federal funds – to comply with the Federal Policy of the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46). According to this policy, ongoing research activities involving human subjects must be reviewed by the IRB, at a minimum of at least once per year. In some cases, such as when research poses a significant risk, the IRB may require more frequent reviews.
This form must be submitted before your study expiration date. (as indicated on your approval letter)
Proposed changes to the prtocol of study documents may NOT be implemented until after the IRB has approved the modification

1. Please indicate the status of your project:
(Choose only one of the following)

____ Continuing Review:
____ Subject recruitment/enrollement continues; current consent/assent required, please attach.
____ Data collection continues with enrolled subjects; no additional subjects will be recruited.

____ Final Report
____ Project has been completed.
____ Data collection has been completed but data analysis continues.
____ The project has not and will not be conducted: Please explain:

2. How many participants have participated in your study? _____

3. Have any unexpected reactions, complications or problems occurred during this study?
____ No
____ If YES, please explain:

4. Have any subjects withdrawn from the study - either voluntarily or at the researcher's request?
____ No
____ If YES, please explain:

5. Have any subjects complained about the study?
____ No
____ If YES, please explain:

6. Has any new information been identified that may affect the willingness of current or future subjects to participate in this study?
____ No
____ If YES, please explain and indicate how it was or will be conveyed to subjects:

7. Have any changes been made to your study (including changes to informed consent docutments, debriefing statements, recruitment materials, etc.) since it was approved by the IRB?

_____ _____ SCSU IRB# **1966 - 2539**
Principal Investigator's Signature Date

Appendix E: PreK–3rd Grade Alignment Study: Implied Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in this study to examine the implementation of PreK through 3rd grade alignment components in your school district. You were selected as a possible participant because you meet one of the following qualifications: you are a current or former superintendent in the school district; you have been an administrator in the school district for at least two years; you have been a PreK, Kindergarten, First-, Second-, or Third- Grade teacher in the school district for at least two years; or you are a parent/guardian of a student in this school district who has experienced the transitions between PreK to Kindergarten and Kindergarten to First-Grade. The research project is being conducted by Megan Rogholt, for a doctoral dissertation through St. Cloud State University.

Background Information and Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the implementation of PreK through 3rd grade alignment components in a Minnesota school district.

Procedures

If you decide to participate, you will take part in an interview conducted on Zoom®. The interviews will be video and audio recorded. After the completion of the interviews, participants will receive a copy of their transcribed interview. At this point, if participants wish to expand responses or note omissions to the transcript, they may.

Risks

There are minimal risks and discomforts related to this study. However for those participants who are not comfortable with technology, the online interview platform may cause some discomfort. Support can be provided by the principal investigator to aide in operating the online platform. Additionally, the demographics and characteristics of the school district described in the study may be recognized by future readers of the research, although every effort will be made to honor the anonymity of this school system. Any concerns about risks and discomforts can be directed to Megan Rogholt, the principal investigator.

Benefits

Educational professionals across the state can obtain an understanding of the essential components of an effective PreK through Grade 3 school system. In particular, participants of the study have the potential to acknowledge and celebrate their school district's work in aligning their PreK through Grade 3 system and share about their implementation process. This study will inform and assist in developing administrators' and teachers' future instructional structures and practices. Parents will have opportunities to share their perspectives and influence how districts can successfully embed family engagement and communication components into school systems. And most importantly, students in this school district, as well as other districts across Minnesota, will benefit from the development of an aligned system that supports student growth and achievement. This study has the potential to help shape educational systems across Minnesota by modeling the effective implementation practices yielded by this school district.

Confidentiality

The audio and video recordings will be stored on the online Zoom® platform under the principal investigator's account. The account is password protected. Responses given during the interviews will be

kept strictly confidential. Participant names will not be disclosed nor will identified direct quotes be used. After statements have been transcribed, the videos will be deleted from the principal investigator's Zoom® account. The transcriptions will be saved on the principal investigator's personal, password-protected computer. Upon completion of the study, the transcriptions of the interviews will be deleted from principal investigator's computer.

Research Results

The results of this research will be made available to all participants via email or the United States Postal Service. Requests for the research can be made by contacting the principal researcher, Megan Rogholt at mrogholt@stcloudstate.edu.

Contact Information

If you have questions please contact the principal researcher at 320-493-6745 or mrogholt@stcloudstate.edu. You may also contact the advisor, John Eller, at jfeller@stcloudstate.edu.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Cloud State University, or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Acceptance to Participate

Joining the scheduled Zoom® meetings indicates you are at least 18 years of age and you agree to participate in this research.

Appendix F: Release Form for Use of Photograph/Video/Audio Recording

An Examination of the Implementation of PreK-Grade 3 Alignment Approaches in a Minnesota Public School System

Megan Rogholt – Principal Investigator/Researcher
mrogholt@stcloudstate.edu

John Eller - Supervisor
jfeller@stcloudstate.edu

Please Print:

_____
Participant Name

_____
Legal Representative if Applicable

This form asks for your consent to use media for and from this study. We would like you to indicate how we can use your media. On the next page is a list of media types that we will use. Please initial where you consent for that type of use of your media. Legal representative initials will provide consent when needed.

Regardless of your answers on the next page, you will not be penalized.

We will not use your media in any way if you have not initialed.

Questions regarding this form should be directed to the researchers. Additional answers can be found by contacting the IRB Administrator or an IRB Committee Member. Current membership is available at: https://www.stcloudstate.edu/irb/members.aspx

A copy of this form will be provided for your records.

Video with audio	
Consent Granted	Type of Release
	Used by research team to record and analyze data

Transcription of audio	
Consent Granted	Type of Release
	Used by research team to record and analyze data
	Read by/to other participants
	Published or presented in an academic outlet (e.g., journal, conference)

I have read the above carefully and give my consent <u>only</u> for those items in which I initialed.

_____ _____
Participant Signature (if 18 years of age or older) Date

_____
Participant Name (Printed)

WHEN CONSENT IS NEEDED FROM A LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE, COMPLETE THIS SECTION. UP TO TWO LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE MAY SIGN.

_____ _____
Legal Representative Signature Date

_____
Legal Representative Name (Printed)

_____ _____
Second Legal Representative Signature Date

_____
Second Legal Representative Name (Printed)